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CHINESE RIVER

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CHINESE DUST

CHINESE NIGHTS

CHINESE CHAPTER

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Chinese River

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To
JENNIE JORDAN KISSAM

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CHINESE RIVER

BOOK ONE

THE FRUIT BUT NOT THE TREE

I

SHE was gazing out to the darkening Chinese landscape from the port-hole of her cabin—a tiny cabin, and with no more to distinguish it than its simple bunk and a lavatory basin of antiquated design. But it was the best that the river could offer. A score of such cabins, a dining-saloon that was also a bar, a couple of bath-rooms, a shelter-deck for one's exercise—and the amenities of the ship's first-saloon were almost entirely described. For the river is not loved. Few men seek it for their pleasure. They say that when the great swirling mists are on it one may see in them the ten thousand unquiet wraiths of that Legion of the Lost; those that have sought escape from it and failed.

But that is another story. Her eyes were young. They were liquid and tolerant and brown beneath her wide, untroubled brow. Strangely, as she looked on its obscene yellow bosom, she could offer the river her smile.

II

She had come to this ancient, bearded China from the great, peopled city of her birth—she, Jennie Davidson, not yet twenty-three. She had been raised there, within the hard metallic roar of its suburbs, her American mother's private income making modest sustenance

for her and an older sister while her father, an artistic but ineffectual Englishman, complained overmuch of his war-wounds. Then, while he talked grandly of university educations for his progeny, the patient, practical little American mother had died, her income dying with her; whereafter he talked of such things no more, but asked a certain measure of tolerance for a breaking heart that must solace itself in liquor. Thus, at seventeen and before she had learned to conjugate her French verbs correctly, Jennie Davidson was attempting to earn her own living; and, if there was a wider and fairer world beyond the glittering, noisy metropolis wherefrom she wrung her bread, then she might hardly believe it. At least, she would laugh at her dreams of it.

When she met Leith Macalister, a young and unmarried probationer in the service of an international trading syndicate, and home on his first leave from China, she was nearly twenty. Self-supporting now, she was confidential secretary to a well-known publicity agent. Her sister Ella, two years older, hard, brilliant, and sophisticated, was a buyer in a fashionable store; the number of her men admirers being as remarkable as the fewness of those favours which she bestowed on them. Their father, elegantly decrepit, now haunted the saloons as thoroughly as their charity to him permitted. If ever their reproaches afflicted him he could always defend himself with silvery, tearful self-pity. "Ay, I'm an old scallywag," he once answered them theatrically, "not worthy of that gentle lady who bore

you. But be patient, my dears. Only a little longer! Last night I heard her calling me. . . . And, Jennie! If that young Macalister starts any more nonsense about going out to China to marry him, don't listen. You'd never see me again. Yes, it's as near as that, Jennie."

Young Macalister, when he learned of that speech, dared to make somewhat bitter comment on it.

"Sure! He heard her calling him. But don't worry. He won't be answering her until they bring in Prohibition. . . . Jennie, I mean it. I'll send for you, directly they give me permission to marry."

He did not fail her. Three years later, when he had been appointed an under-manager of the syndicate's depot in Nanking, he renewed his plea. *Am sending passage-money. Come out and marry me*, he cabled to her. At which in the Davidson household there broke fierce emotional storm. "A hole like China!" her sister raved. "Dirt, disease, and nothing for your evenings except a book and an oil-lamp. You're mad. . . . And you're going to walk out and leave me with *him*. . . . His drink, his debts, his doctor's bills. Kind of you, noble!"

And if their much-discussed father presented his case in more dignified light, it was to the same disturbing end. . . . "Nanking! That terrible Yangtse river! I met a chap yesterday who says the white folk there just die like flies. Jennie, if you go you'll be digging my grave for me. And supposing he altered his mind and wouldn't let you send me any cash?"

Already she had made her decision, however. There

came that day when she parted from them; her father abandoning reproaches at the last moment in order to borrow a little more money; her sister silent, tight-lipped, resentful until she could avenge herself with that well-rehearsed good-bye:

“Well, if you want to come back, I suppose there’ll be a roof for you, old thing. But don’t be too long in doing it. China gets you, they say. Your hair dries up, your teeth drop out. . . . Oh, and widows are slightly out of fashion nowadays.”

III

Leith Macalister had met her ship when it moored in the river at Shanghai. In that moment her last little uncertainty about him could die. Laughing and eager, he was detailing his plans even before the tender had made the brief journey to the Bund. They would be married by their consul at Nanking three days later. . . . “Three whole days! A ghastly risk,” he complained almost seriously. “Think of the things I could die of. But the consul is away until then, trying to clear up a bit of political stink about a missionary chap who’s got himself murdered in the interior.”. . . In the meantime they would remain in Shanghai, he had decided. He had one or two friends in the city who had expressed a wish to meet her. And Shanghai was a little more entertaining than Nanking, he ventured apologetically. . . . “Don’t want to frighten you, darling, but Nanking isn’t exactly Piccadilly or Broadway.

No permanent waves, no night-clubs. If you want to have a tooth out, you either hit it with a hammer or wait till you can get down here. Which reminds me. I need a hair-cut and a bath. . . . Bath? Oh yes, we have a bath *of sorts* up there. But it's only an overgrown pudding-basin. You stand up in it . . . rub yourself down . . . hope for the best. And your best friends are polite, of course. They call it the smell from the river."

She accepted that delay gratefully, for after her long journey her wardrobe needed a certain amount of attention. They took rooms at the Palace Hotel, devoting their days to shopping and sightseeing, and their evenings to meeting his various friends.

Then, only a few hours before they were due to go to Nanking, there had come that unexpected set-back to his plans. Miserably one evening he flourished before her a telegram. It was to order him to go immediately to relieve a colleague who had contracted fever.

In vain he stormed at his superiors over the long-distance telephone. They fully appreciated his position, they said, but there was not another trained man on the syndicate's pay-roll who could be released. Moreover, they could not possibly allow him to delay the journey until after the wedding. Delay would be dangerous, for, in addition to being without skilled medical attention, the sick man was the sole guardian of a lonely depot far up-river in the interior and in a region that was notorious for the hostility of its local Chinese officials.

It was Jennie who eventually succeeded in reminding him of his duty to the syndicate.

"You must go," she said. "He's sick. Think! It might have been you, my dear. . . . And if they'll let me, I'm going with you."

But that would be an impossibility, as he well knew. Too dangerous the journey for her; the syndicate would never permit it. Early next morning he transferred her to the care of his friends, a sympathetic young married couple living in the French Concession. "Only a week or two!" he said airily, but they knew he was mercifully deceiving her. Three months perhaps; two at the least!

The weeks dragged on, relieved only by an occasional message from him. His first letter, written from the sick man's depot, took a whole fortnight to reach her. Because he told her nothing of his doings she could fear for him the more, for daily the newspapers had harrowed her imagination with their stories of bandit outrages, kidnappings, murders. But, at last, nine weeks later, there came his lengthy telegram. The sick man had recovered; Leither was on his way back, hoping to reach Nanking two days later. In the meantime, and to save any further delay, he was instructing his Chinese "boy" to proceed to Shanghai and bring her to Nanking also. Leither would meet their boat. They would marry on the next day.

"But why the river-boat?" she questioned her hosts in the midst of her joy. "I thought the train to Nanking was quicker."

“It is!” she was laughingly answered. “But once in a while the railway goes bad. Someone puts a bomb on it or borrows it for a war. Still, considering he’s talked of no one but you for the last three years, you can’t exactly blame him. He’s taking no chances . . . Well, this really sounds like a wedding, after all.”

IV

The dusk was deepening, giving to the river a strange metallic gleam. Still gazing from her porthole, she could see on the nearer bank the springing of lights within the huddled Chinese villages. She was close enough to them to see the pink-washed walls encircling them; sometimes above the rumble of the ship’s engines to hear human voices or the barking of a dog. And those sounds were warm, human, reassuring, echoing that promise of *home*. . . . Home! His home, hers, theirs! Theirs as long as life, she might surely swear.

A gong sounded. It would be the first warning of approaching dinner-time. But she was sure that she would be unable to eat. Nanking in just a few hours; Leith awaiting her; his strong arms; the certainty thereafter. Dinner—impossible! She left the cabin and went on deck.

She stood there, the cool autumnal wind of the river tugging at her hair, while the dusk sank into night. There was no moon, but the stars leapt out in an inky sky. Unseen, a flight of ducks passed over her, the tense

purposeful sound of them living and dying dramatically all in a second. A sampan flashed by, the faces of its crew barbaric in the glow of a brazier, the smell of their evening meal sweet and drugging to her nostrils like incense. And this was the river which during those restless waiting weeks in Shanghai had prompted people's pity for her—a sniff, a shrug of the shoulders, silence at the least. . . . “Going to live up-river, eh? Well, I hope you'll like it!” was the best that ever they had said of it. But she could not be afraid. She could smile to the river and love it almost. For it was bearing her to him. Three little hours, two-and-a-half, one more sigh, another look at one's mirror, a thrill; and then—it would have yielded him to her.

She started. Someone had surprised her reverie, coming noiselessly to her beneath the thudding of the ship's engines. It was Mrs. Bender, her fellow-passenger, who journeyed to Nanking also.

Mrs. Bender, a middle-aged Englishwoman with carefully dyed hair, made comment on the evening in the tentative manner of one whose friendliness might possibly be an indiscretion. But after a while she dared to abandon her restraint. She liked this girl, she decided; she must know more of her.

“So you're young Macalister's fiancée,” she was eventually exclaiming in delighted surprise. “How marvellous, and what a coincidence! Mac is quite the nicest boy on my visiting-list. And you haven't seen him for three years. Well, you'll still approve of him, I think. A charming boy, a——”

Here, however, Jennie had to correct her. She told Mrs. Bender some little concerning her reunion with Leith at Shanghai. Which set the lady instantly apologizing.

"Good gracious, how foolish of me not to recall it, Miss Davidson! I've been in Shanghai myself for a while. But I distinctly remember it now. Mac had planned the wedding for the end of August; of course, of course. . . . Well, my dear, all's well that ends well. And I can really be the very first of the Nanking-ites to congratulate you."

Yet suddenly Mrs. Bender was endeavoring to pierce the darkness and give Jennie a more interested stare. Something in that story of young Leith Macalister and his fiancée had now sunk into her mind deeply enough to stir her curiosity.

"So you stayed at the Palace, eh?" she commented archly. "Really, you naughty young people! I shall have to read your Mac a lesson."

But, as quickly, Mrs. Bender redeemed that mild reproof with a girlish laugh.

"Take no notice of me, my dear," she begged indulgently. "I'm the last person in the world to say a thing like that seriously. Why shouldn't an engaged couple stay at the same hotel, especially in these—er—sensible days? . . . Well, I must go and powder my nose. I'll see you at dinner. And we must have a chat over the coffee, don't forget!"

Uttering another girlish laugh Mrs. Bender went, but Jennie remained, standing and looking down to the

ship's well-deck where the native third-class passengers were permitted to take their recreation. Squatting, they ate their meals or bargained with the vendors of cakes and sweetmeats. A youth of hardly more than fourteen, his wrists tied with string, jested shrilly with a throng of coolies. He had committed some petty misdemeanor at Nanking and was being taken back there for trial. He would probably be executed; nevertheless a jest was expected of him; only a woman might go to death silent or weeping. But the policeman who guarded and escorted him had heard such jests before; they no longer amused him; he turned his back on them, scratching the ringworm of his scalp while he grinned at a group of gamblers.

The gong sounded for dinner. Jennie Davidson still stood there, though she hardly saw that scene. She was musing on Mrs. Bender's parting utterance. . . . "Why shouldn't an engaged couple stay at the same hotel?"

Why not indeed? Why not *anything* if it enshrined truly the unselfish ache to serve and solace one's man? The man who had waited patiently for three long, hungry years—. The same hotel! Nine weeks ago! Yes, she could be almost sure—and glad in the knowledge.

Glancing down to the well-deck again, she was interested in it for the first time. Her eye fell and rested upon a sight that moved her inexplicably: within that jostling, crowded humanity, a Chinese woman began to suckle her babe.

V

Yes, she could be almost sure of it. She was taking to Leith Macalister their child. Poor Leith! Man-like, probably he had never given that possibility a moment's thought.

Smiling a little, she wondered what he would say. But, of her own confession to him she was certain.

"My dear, I can only be sorry or embarrassed if *you* are."

Just that; no more, no less! And though people such as Mrs. Bender might ventilate their shrewd guesses, no other opinion than his would matter.

"I'm his!" she had a hundred times hurled at her momentary doubts. "His! And nothing else matters."

Her thoughts marched on, calmly, serenely. She could hear now her father's elegant surprise as he opened her letter and read that news. "Dear, dear! Jennie a mother—already! Well, I suppose there's—er—nothing very unusual about it." . . . Poor Father with his childlike respectability; he would most likely go out and get drunk again. And Ella her sister, while forbearing to shatter that simplicity, would give him her sage, pitying smile. "The little fool," she would utter within herself. "Well, what did I tell her? It's the goody-goody ones who always crash the hardest." . . . But, poor Ella, nevertheless! For it would hurt her; she who had sworn never to bring a child into the world though a husband might clothe her with

diamonds; she who had cried, "Jennie, I'd rather kill myself." Yes, deep down within Ella would stir the ache of her envy. "Jennie is happy! God, why am I such a coward?"

Yes, and that might be a woman's most satisfying happiness, the happiness of being afraid no more. How strange that such a simple thing as carrying her man's child might achieve it for her. But it was true; once, like Ella, she had feared; she had feared a host of things . . . age . . . poverty . . . loneliness . . . death; she had even feared the dark. Yet now the secret of Fear lay exposed and ridiculous. Fear was only the miserable echo of Self. Fear died as soon as Self was banished. And Self was banished by that new life springing and growing within her. Let her love and nurture it, and nothing could make her afraid save her own limitations.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of Death . . .

She could understand the old Psalm at last.

VI

That journey was almost done. Away to her left lay the scattered lights of Nanking. Already she saw the huddled shapes of ships and launches at its Bund. The sound of a motor-klaaxon could almost thrill her. Supposing it were his!

Just as she had put on her hat, Mrs. Bender came to her cabin.

"My dear," exclaimed Mrs. Bender, "you simply must let me go ashore with you. I want to see the look on the young rascal's face. Young Mac married! Tomorrow! . . . And my husband will be meeting me, of course. He's the 'number-one' of the A.E.C. here—the Asiatic Electrical Corporation. You and Mac must have your first drinks with us."

She made no demur, but thanked Mrs. Bender, flattered by her frank affection for Leith. "Who *doesn't* like him?" Mrs. Bender had already demanded a half-dozen times.

At last the ship was berthed, its arrival plunging the quiet waterfront into a chaos of noise and stampede. From the rail of the shelter-deck, Jennie smiled down to a clamouring, jostling mob of porters, rickshaw coolies, hotel touts, beggars; while, guardian-like, Leith's "boy" who had escorted her gave that scene the silent, superior scorn which the trained Chinese house-servant can affect so perfectly before his masters. Artistically, Mrs. Bender echoed his mood, appropriating as her own a phrase which she had once encountered in a travel-book: "Hungry China, scrambling eternally for its bread-and-*no*-butter!"

"But, gosh!" she added more personally, "the way these filthy mobs are allowed to pester travellers is nothing short of a scandal. We need a few more prisons in Nanking, a few more floggings."

Suddenly, however, her displeasure at that enforced wait was dispelled.

"I think I saw Claude just then!" she exclaimed.

"Claude's my husband, of course. I caught a glimpse of him for a moment, trying to fight his way through to us. Poor Claude, how he hates coming to the Bund to meet me! He always swears he'll get spotted fever one of these days. . . . But, my dear, if that was Claude, your Mac was with him. They're as thick as thieves . . . play 'contract' together . . . 'snooker' at the club. My dear, our best smiles for 'em . . . No, no! I've thought of something better. Get into that saloon for a moment. When I see Mac, I'll pretend you haven't come."

But now Mrs. Bender moved to more urgent exclamation.

"Claude!" she cried, and made an impulsive step towards an elderly man who came soberly along the deck to them.

"Claude, my dear, how sweet of you! I know how you hate it so. And, Claude, look what I've brought you—Mac's fiancée, of all people. Miss Davidson, my husband! But, Claude . . . where *is* Mac! I thought the two of you would run into each other here."

And then Claude Bender stared at Jennie suddenly and aghast, forgetting even to raise his hat to her.

"Mac's fiancée!" he echoed dully. "Mac's . . ."

He could not finish that utterance. He could only stare at her again, marking her beauty, the mute questioning of her parted lips.

"Er—how do you do?" he began correctly. But the effort failed him. Impulsively, and with no other word

to Jennie, he seized his wife's arm, dragging her precipitately into the adjacent saloon.

"My God!" he breathed to her there, and great beads of perspiration stood on his brow. "How are we going to tell her? Mac isn't here, Linda. This morning . . . and on this damned river . . . there was fighting with the Communists near Wuhu . . . his ship happened to be passing. Yes, dead! A stray bullet. This accursed Yangtse river again. . . . Dead!"

Book Two
RIVERS ROLL ON

I

THEY took him away to burial, their cars following him precariously over the narrow, unkept roads. In that alien Chinese place where they laid him, the words of the Anglican funeral service could seem futile, a waste of time, a mockery almost. He did not belong to that soil; already his soul had fled from it . . . quickly, like a wild bird released from a cage. And that was not merely a thought; it was a hope, one's fierce and arrogant prayer. "God!" exclaimed one of their number who had sought to fortify himself with a measure of gin too much. "If ever you chaps can convince me that death is no better than dying like a dog, I'll leave this rotten country there and then."

The murmured words of committal were finished; silently, critically, they watched the coolies cover his coffin with earth, ready with reproof against their slightest show of inefficiency or disrespect; then, trying not to see the grinning Chinese soldiers whom they had attracted to the place or the horde of peasant children who waited to steal their flowers from his grave, they returned to their cars, looking not back.

And now having mourned him, and handed his more valuable personal effects to the vice-consul, though wondering how much his servants had taken from him in the meantime, they remembered the perils that might threaten a man in the chill Chinese sundown. Chang-

ing quickly out of their unaccustomed black while their "boys" brought them whiskies, they went to the Customs Club, where, if those others who diced so noisily for drinks could seem to forget young Leith Macalister a little too soon, one could forgive them nevertheless. And later, when they went in a party to dinner, the shock of that happening had begun to wear away.

"Sure!" said one. "A good-looker! I saw her down at the Bund last night when she arrived. . . . Tough on her! But I guess she'll go back. A pity!"

But the night was not yet done. There came that hour when restraint is no longer on a man.

"Boy, boy! What's that damned boy doing with those drinks? *Kuei-ti*, boy! . . . Yes, according to all the rumours they stayed a couple of nights at the Shanghai Palace. Well, you never know!"

II

She was stirring from that long drugged sleep which mercifully a little German doctor had given her, the studied luxury of Mrs. Bender's best guest-room assailing her unfamiliarly. Still only half believing, she was dazedly recalling it all . . . the ship, the Bund, Claude Bender's face, the way they tried to make her drunk before they had courage to tell her the stark truth. Hot shafts of memory began to stab her imagination like knives.

But she could still smile, she could still wish to live, she could still crave to remember it all. Better the bitter-sweet consciousness than stupefaction. She got

from bed and dismissed the *amah* whom Mrs. Bender had ordered so strictly to watch over her. Almost punching her cheeks as she banished their pallor with rouge, she resolutely faced a mirror.

"No, my dear," she whispered to him fiercely, "I don't *want* to forget, I don't *want* to blot it out. I'm glad of it, glad that I could make you happy . . . prove to you I loved you.

"And, Leith, my dear, hear me! Even had I known . . . could have seen it coming to us . . . it would have been just the same. No hesitation, my dear . . . yours, yours . . . just the same."

Might the dear God make him conscious of it!

And yet, she must not dwell too deeply in that memory of him; at least, not for a while. She had to think not as they had thought . . . careless, dreaming . . . but in terms of that morrow without him.

"We've got to live!" she cried. . . . *We!* She; her child. . . . And that word was challenge, defiance. *We!* Because of it her heart, if necessary, must grow cold and hard and grim.

"Yes, we've got to live . . . we . . . *you!* And if they make me, I'll lie for you, cheat for you . . . anything!"

Yes, easy to utter thus! Where and how might she begin?

III

Her first thought on learning of his death had been to return to her father and sister. True, she did not pos-

sess sufficient money for the journey, but there should be ways and means of procuring it. Her consular people would probably repatriate her at their Government's expense, reclaiming the money from her at such time as she could afford to repay it. Yes, and when her baby was born, she could work again, hold her head high, laugh in the faces of those who dared to pity her.

But her father, her sister! She did not fear to face them, but inevitably it would make her despise them even the more. She could see her father's outraged respectability, his panic even. True, he might drink himself into insensibility under the slightest emotional stress, and make flimsy, lachrymose love to any woman who gave him an ounce of encouragement. But he had always forgiven himself such sins; they had flown from his memory as soon as he could creep home and put on a clean shirt. Sin? Well, as he so indulgently judged it, a thing was only a sin if one couldn't wriggle away from the umbrage it cast, if it labelled one, held one up to ridicule. But . . . "A child? Good heavens, Jennie!" . . . While twice since she had landed in China had come his letters, subtly mendicant with their talk of doctor's bills and unexpected repairs to the house, their hint of her neglect of him.

And Ella, her sister? Ella's charity was only for those who would crawl in bondage to her. She'd linger to hear a beggar's second "Thank you, lady!"

No! Rather than seek them might she be condemned by heaven itself—and die!

The hours passed. The afternoon had waned, and

sunset had fled from the willows, and they had come back from burying her man. And Mrs. Bender had come and gone and come again, garrulously sympathetic one moment, mutely questioning the next. . . . "My home, my husband, my respectability!" Mrs. Bender's eyes seemed to say. "Why don't you put me out of my misery, why don't you tell me?"

Yes, she must tell Mrs. Bender. But what?

IV

She had at last decided upon something—that precarious, desperate plan. There was one who might genuinely be sorry for her, trust her, help her; he, old Henderson, her former employer.

She found a note-pad, making confession to him, giving him her fears, her contempt for that word *home*, yet her aspirations and promises also. Would he help her until she could help herself? Would he cable her some money? For he could trust her. When she was well again, she would ask to return to his office, working her fingers to the bone to repay him.

Yes, with old Henderson's money to help her, she might take herself from Nanking, sparing her fellow white people the embarrassment which her presence would surely give them. In some place on her homeward journey she could pause to hide herself for a while, prepare herself for her baby's coming; no one need be embarrassed again until it was done, until once more she stood free and independent. Better still, no

one save old Henderson need ever know; her baby would be her own precious guarded secret, safe from the world's righteousness, its contempt.

"Yes, no one will ever know, Leith. And, Leith, it's for your sake too. They wouldn't understand, and I couldn't bear to hear them say it about you, my dear. I'd want to kill 'em, I think."

She sealed that letter, marking it via the short Siberian route, though three weeks at least must pass before old Henderson received it. But she had money enough until then, and old Henderson would surely not ignore her. She went downstairs.

"Yes," she surprised Mrs. Bender. "Much better, thank you . . . very much better. And, please, Mrs. Bender, you mustn't worry about me any more. I shall be all right now. There's an hotel here, I think. Leith sometimes mentioned it in his letters—the Yangtse Hotel. I think I'll take a room there tomorrow."

"My dear, I wouldn't dream of it," her hostess sought energetically to assure her, but she continued cautiously nevertheless. "Er—well, how long exactly did you think of staying here? I mean, there's no sense in going to a gloomy old hotel if you're only staying a few days."

Jennie smiled, forcing into her answer every suggestion of matter-of-fact reality that she could command.

"No, a little longer . . . three or four weeks, probably. There are Leith's affairs to see to. I haven't yet met his people, but they'd hardly like it if I left his

affairs to chance. Oh, and before I go, I must see about some sort of stone for his grave."

At which Mrs. Bender stared at her for a moment and blushed. What if one's suspicions about this girl were wrong after all?

"Er—yes!" she commented a little uncomfortably. "Splendid! My dear, I can see you don't lack courage. But—er—where will you go when you leave here?"

"I shall go back home," Jennie answered even more casually. "I shall try to get back my old job, and I think my employer will have me. Next spring he has to go to Brazil—a very important business tour. He wanted me to postpone the wedding and go with him. Yes, I'm sure he'll have me back."

"Next spring, eh? Brazil!"

And then Mrs. Bender gave vent to her feelings in mingling tears and laughter.

"Oh, my dear, I'm so glad, so relieved. I'd feared that—oh, well, you understand! I'm glad you've taken it so splendidly, so courageously. Yes, my dear, you're going to live again . . . laugh again . . . yes, laugh."

Jennie patted her hand.

"Yes, laugh!" she echoed noisily. "Why not, why not?"

V

Those three weeks had nearly passed. The leaves were falling, the little Chinese children scavenging them from the ditches to make them fires against the

chill of late October. The cicadas chirped no more in the willows. People put away their mosquito nets.

Yes, laugh! . . . But none could be more surprised at the thoroughness of that laughter than Mrs. Bender who had counselled it.

"Yes, a remarkable girl," she exclaimed one afternoon over bridge. "I didn't think she could do it. It's amazing. A pity I let her go to that hotel, though she insisted, of course. . . . Still, it depends on how much a woman loves a man, I suppose. Really, sometimes you might almost think she's forgotten him."

And there were those who echoed her more pointedly.

"Yes, I hear she was out at the club last night—the International," Mrs. Bender was informed. "And that ghastly Randall was with her, drinking . . . dancing."

But the majority of Nanking's white community was not displeased. Mrs. Brabazon, the wife of the American Consul, could report with triumph that Cecil, her only son, who long had lamented his unpopularity with women, was teaching "poor Miss Davidson" to ride. And in the Customs Club, where Nanking's many bachelors drank late and safe from feminine hearing, the tantalizing effect of her physical presence had become a profound and almost nightly subject. . . .

"But a woman's a woman, all the same. She can't go on mourning a chap for ever. . . . Sure! Any darned woman, if you get her in the right mood."

She was not unaware of this growing discussion of her. She had expected it; encouraged it, indeed. With it, their last little suspicion concerning herself and Leith

was being obliterated. While, if sometimes she winced at the exaggeration which was given to her apparent light-heartedness or recoiled from the more ardent of Nanking's menfolk, she might solace herself with the thought that in one short week or so she would be free from that nightmare, never to think of it, never to live it again.

But she could suddenly question the wisdom of her doings. Though it was nearly four weeks since she had written to old Henderson, his answer had not yet come.

VI

When first that fear had gripped her, she was dressing herself for an afternoon drive to Purple Mountain with Andrew Pavey, a young American architect who had recently come to China under contract to advise the Nanking authorities on their new town-planning scheme. She had been out with Pavey before, walking with him on Socony Hill where the richer members of the white community had their villas, or visiting the city's faded and neglected temples. Once they had gone to a cinema. And she liked him; she liked his quaint mixture of youthful irresponsibility and earnest bookishness; and no less fascinatingly quaint was that mixture of his speech, for, while he had been raised in Southern California, a rich and artistically-minded aunt at Boston had paid his expenses in an English school. But, most of all, she liked him for his obvious respect of her. He did not seek to peer into her mind; the

gaze of his rather musing grey eyes could plead for her favours yet never seem to explore her. "Er—good night, and—well, thanks a lot," he would utter abruptly, and go his way.

Yet, on this afternoon as they drove out to the mountain, his habitual disinterest in her personal affairs was more than once broken. He had glanced at her, marking her silence, her pallor, the deepening hollows of her cheeks, and at first he had attributed these things to her recent tragedy. But later he began to wonder whether her mood might spring from something else. He had noticed her trembling hands, the nervous way she would start when he addressed her, the excessive laughter which she gave him as she recovered herself.

"Look here!" he exclaimed suddenly, and brought the car to a halt. "I don't think you're too well. A chill, perhaps, and that old mountain will seem rather gloomy with no sun about. Let's go back to the hotel . . . hot tea . . . toast . . . a whiskey, if you'd like it."

She had feared that speech, had half prepared herself for it.

"No! And there's a spot on your nose," she retorted banteringly. "I think I shall like the mountain, and I want some photographs to send home to my—my father. Believe me, I'm often quiet . . . irritatingly quiet . . . just the outward and visible sign of a brain that's empty. Yes, shake me and you'll hear the cavernous echoes."

He smiled and drove on, but she had not yet convinced him.

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"That hotel of yours!" he was uttering presently. "If you don't mind my saying so, I don't like your being there. Too many beery bachelors there, and you're the only unmarried girl among 'em, I guess."

And then that speech became more urgent.

"Look here, somebody in that hotel has upset you today. Tell me who he is, and I'll sock his jaw."

She had to laugh; so genuinely amusing was that boyish unexpected intensity. But in a moment her laughter died. She had once encountered that self-same mood in someone else. Recognizing it, and knowing its significance, she could suddenly be afraid.

"Nonsense!" she reproved him, yet trembling as she said it. "They're all perfectly harmless boys, and I'm old enough to take care of myself in any event. But, now you mention it, I'm leaving the hotel . . . very soon."

"Fine!" he commented, but saw her sober headshake.

"No!" she said. "I'm leaving Nanking . . . leaving China, probably."

For a long moment he was silent. Then he made answer, staring straight in front of him.

"I shall miss you. . . . Er—that gateway in front of us is part of the old Tartar City."

## VII

Well, if Andrew Pavey had fallen in love with her, she might blame no one except herself. Too many

times had she been content to accept his company, yet never pausing to think of its possible effect on him. When, a little while later, he began his clumsy proposal to her, she could not steel herself to cut it short; she could only hate herself for a selfish and unthinking fool.

They had reached Purple Mountain, and, leaving the car, were staring at the huge stone effigies of gods and animals which guarded the ancient approach to the Ming Tombs.

"Yes," he murmured, as she exclaimed involuntarily at their grandeur, "the old Chinese could certainly give us lessons in dignity. Still, we moderns are doing our best, I suppose. And by the way, when I'm through with this town-planning contract, I may have a little more to my credit than I possess now. Yes, the officials here are giving me practically—er—virtually a free hand, so if I don't show the world a thing or two that's new, it'll be entirely my own fault. . . . But two years is a long time. Yes, for two years I have to stick here, and not another darned interest in the place except bridge and beer. And I guess I'm rotten at both."

"Go on being rotten. It'll be worth it," she tried to console him. "Think of what people will say when you get back to America and show them what you've done. Why, you'll be famous."

"Sure, it will be great," he retorted unenthusiastically; and then impulsively he made her halt, and had seized her hands.

"Look here, if I sound like—like some sort of



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ghoul, forgive me," he blurted. "And if you hadn't told me you were leaving here I would never have said it. But I can't help feeling that way about you. Being out here, becoming successful, won't mean a thing unless I can see you again. Yes, call me a dirty swine to talk to you at a time like this, but I can't help it. . . . Jennie, I want you to marry me."

*Jennie!* And he had uttered it for the first time. But he released her. . . . "God, how you must hate me!" he cried in his sudden misery.

She did not reprove him. Only did she know her pity for him. How like a lonely motherless boy he was.

"No," she answered gently. "I don't hate you. How absurd to think it. And Life goes on—yes, it's got to go on, whatever our memories. But, Mr. Pavey—er—Andrew, it has to go on sensibly, and as sensibly as we can make it."

She sought to cheer him with a smile.

"Think!" she continued. "You're probably talking to me like this because you're sorry for me; or if it isn't that, because you're a little bit sorry for yourself, and I happen to be one of the very few women here. If this were America, and two years hence, well, you wouldn't give me a second thought."

His mood changed again.

"Sure of it?" he demanded almost teasingly.

"Absolutely. Believe me, when I've gone, you're going to plan your life just as you'll plan this new Nanking here . . . the sensible foundations first, the

solidity; the ornaments and refinements last. Yes, whoever she is, she'll make you happier in the end if you don't look for her too soon."

He grinned. "Good advice!" he exclaimed. "But only for building cities. For building happiness, you crash in at the first sound of the dance-band; you don't wait till your knees creak. Still, forget it. It needs two to take the dance-floor. You've been darned generous about it, and I'm a crazy bull in a china-shop. . . . Cigarette?"

They walked on in silence for a while. His hands were thrust carelessly into his jacket pockets; his head thrust back as he whistled. Perhaps he was decently content to refer to it no more. Yet she could be puzzled at herself. Why should she feel so lonely suddenly?

And then he surprised her.

"Yes, you've got to leave China," he said, and his voice was as calm as those tree-clad slopes beyond them. "China's only safe if you can laugh at it . . . if you haven't an ache in your heart. Yes, go back.

"But, Jennie, it isn't ended," he added as he halted and faced her. "I mean, not so far as I'm concerned. I'm taking your advice; I'm going to lay the foundations first and leave the refinements for tomorrow. And that applies just as much to myself as to rebuilding this battered old Nanking. But tomorrow must come. Jennie, when I leave here in two years, and have something worth while to show you, I shall be looking for



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you. Yes, if you'll accept it, that's my promise to you."

"Your promise? But . . ."

She faltered, she stared at him, she wept.

## VIII

Old Henderson's cable had not come. It would never come now.

Only by the merest chance did she learn it. Her father had written her again, praying effusively for the health of herself and Leith as a prelude to reciting his latest financial woes. So extravagantly did he devote himself to this that, disgustedly, she had put the letter down half-read, not troubling to look at it again until two days later when she was feeling in more gentle mood towards him. Then, hidden unexpectedly in the most dramatic part of that appeal to her, she encountered the news of old Henderson's death.

*It is not easy for me to beg money from a son-in-law who is almost a stranger to me [her father declared magnificently]. However, I am sure you will not regret asking him. "Cast thy bread upon the waters and thou shalt find it after many days" is the biblical injunction, I believe, and never did it seem more appropriate than now. For I have just read in the newspaper something that will interest you. Henderson, your old employer, was killed last night with three other people, flying back from Paris. Considering your several years with*

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*him and the way he looked after you each Christmas, I am sure he has not overlooked you in his will. Anyhow, I think I shall venture on your behalf to address a word of condolence to the widow, knowing that you yourself would wish to do so if you were here. . . .*

Yes, and he would have done so, the silky old hypocrite, sparing nothing in the way of fulsome lavishness. Yet he might have saved his time. She had seen old Henderson's will; indeed, in silent approval, she had typed the rough notes for it from his own dictation. . . . "Everything to my wife," he had ordered. "As for my friends and those who have so faithfully worked for me, I have preferred to show them my affection and gratitude during my lifetime. My friends do not need my gifts, and, instead of tempting my employees to pray for my untimely decease, I have already rewarded them, I flatter myself, with modestly generous wages, liberal conditions of employment, and always a sympathetic regard for their grievances."

But too sick was she with shock to give her father's behaviour any more than a moment's disgust. . . . Mr. Henderson dead, poor old man! Old Henderson who so much had loved life, who so much had deserved it! Well, she could have faith in him again; he surely would have answered her. Meanwhile, who had read her letter to him?

But would it matter? She opened her hand-bag, frowningly seeking the slim little book in which she kept account of her expenditure.

## IX

She had not seen Andrew Pavey for three days, and for this she could blame only herself. Though she could not exactly define her reasons for doing so, since their visit to Purple Mountain she had avoided him deliberately, pleading, whenever he telephoned her, engagements elsewhere. And if sometimes her desire to escape him had thrown her into the company of the community's more questionable menfolk, she could not regret it. It was safer to go from a man despising and forgetting him than to like him too well.

When Andrew Pavey surprised her by calling on her at the Yangtse Hotel, only an hour or so after she had read of old Henderson's death, she could not be angry with him. Nor could she hope to hide from him her dejected mood.

"Yes," she admitted, when they had found the greater privacy of the hotel garden. "Some bad news, and—well, a rather big disappointment with it. And, Mr. Pavey, I'm—well, this is the last time I shall be seeing you."

He tried to grin.

"Bad luck!" he exclaimed. "But, last time we met, it was *Andrew* . . . *Andy*, for preference, though! Still, a dog by any other name smells no less foul, as the poet said. Is there anything Mr. Pavey can do to help you, madam?"

She shook her head.

"So you're going back to England?" he murmured.

"Yes, to England."

And then miserably she corrected herself.

"No, that's too bad of me. You don't deserve it. Mr. Pavey—*Andy!* I wonder could you keep a secret. I'm *not* leaving China. I'm merely going to—to Shanghai, Peking perhaps . . . anywhere, in fact, where I can get—well, don't tell anyone; I'm looking for a job. Perhaps you could help me—give me your advice, I mean."

"A job!" he echoed, and frowned. . . . "I'll say you're more in need of a holiday!" he almost exclaimed. . . . "What sort of a job?" he asked.

"Anything," she answered. "But I'd been thinking I might get a secretarial post with one of the big companies in Shanghai."

"You might," he agreed dubiously. "But don't be mistaken about Shanghai. I mean, there are plenty of women there already . . . girls from good homes who don't need jobs at all; who just take 'em for the pin-money, the independence. And, just to flood the market a little more, there are all the 'russki' girls, of course—the White Russian refugees—thousands of 'em! And they'll snatch at a job for less than what it would cost you for a decent room and breakfast. No, you couldn't compete with 'em. Think twice about it."

"You're not very encouraging!"

"Sure, I'm not. But I like to be original!"

"Of course," he added, with a half-teasing grin, "if you'd like me to pat your head, invite you to cast your cares on me, and say 'Sweetheart, I'll get you a job



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tomorrow,' I'll do it . . . just like any other bozo would. But, as I said, I like to be original. It wouldn't get you anywhere."

She was silent for a moment; and then came her impulsive murmur.

"Thanks, Andy! Yes, thanks—very much!"

She could like him the more.

"But look here!" he was now exclaiming. "If you *must* take a job, why not in England?"

"Oh, but I beg your pardon," he added quickly. "Perhaps it's none of my business."

She hesitated, warning herself that she must study her reply carefully.

"I don't want to go to England—at least, not yet," she began at last. "Perhaps I was glad to get away from it. Anyhow, you might as well know it; my family and I don't see eye to eye on everything. For instance, they'd never wanted me to marry Leith."

He nodded. "But England's big enough," he ventured. "You don't have to meet 'em if you don't want to."

And then he put that sudden and searching question.

"Look here, if you're in a jam—over money, I mean—why not let me help you? I'm not rich, but I guess I could raise your passage-money without too much risk of a headache. And—well, you could always repay me when you fell into the champagne bucket. Yes, and be honest with me. You don't have to be afraid. That's just your difficulty; isn't it, Jennie? . . . Money!"

She would not make that denial too emphatic; indeed, how could she logically? But she must be very cautious, extremely cautious.

"It is," she answered laughingly. "It's the difficulty for most of us, I imagine. But don't misunderstand me. If I wanted to get back, I could always do it. I've a little money of my own. And, in any event, a woman in difficulties can always go to her consul, I believe. No, it's just that I want to stay out here until I can—well, until I can make up my mind about my future . . . whether I return to my father and sister, or—or, tell 'em to go chase themselves!"

"Only that?" he uttered after a moment's frowning pause.

"Yes, only that!"

That assurance seemed to satisfy him. As they strolled on, he began to smile.

"Well, if that's all that's worrying you, I'll be a fool if I don't find you a job," he exclaimed in rising mood. "The darnedest fool, in fact! . . . But, Shanghai! I don't think you're going to find much luck there. And it's rather a tough place for a girl all alone."

Then he surprised her with his jubilant laugh.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" he cried. "Look here, it's not exactly the Astor millions I'm offering you, but, if I asked 'em, these Chinese johnnies here would probably let me have an English secretary. In fact, I know they would. I was talking about it to old General Chan, the mayor here, only the other day. And that's not fooling! When we get those plans ap-



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proved, I'll probably need not one secretary, but a whole flock of 'em. . . . Yes, I have it, Jennie. I take you on as my secretary. I'll speak to Chan tomorrow. And if he doesn't like it, I'll bludgeon him . . . threaten to walk out on him. Nanking can remain in its primordial ooze, or whatever they call it, I'll tell him. Cheers! Find me a hat, someone. I want to throw it in the air."

"There isn't a hat! They buried it with him—the man who counted his chickens before they were hatched, and died of disappointment!"

But that light-hearted jest masked her pain; the sudden anguish of a trapped animal, almost.

"Andy!" she blurted incontinently. "I can't, I can't! I've got to leave here, I've got to . . ."

Yet she checked that speech, biting her lips, drowning it with an agonized moan. . . . "What am I saying? Leith, for God's sake help me," ran her desperate prayer. "For God's sake!"

Then she found control of herself.

"I'm behaving like a little fool," she exclaimed, forcing back her tears. "Forgive me, forget it. Just nerves . . . not enough sleep. I think I'll go indoors, take an aspirin or two, go to bed. And—well, I think you understand, Andy. There's nothing you can do. . . . Thanks! Thanks very much. . . . Good-bye!"

He was nodding; dully he was smiling at her.

"Yes, I think I understand," he answered, but he barred her way. "Sit down!" he ordered her. "Come

along—that seat over there. Sure, you’re sick . . . you need sleep . . . and you’re going to get it, Jennie. But there are two of us . . . two of us, I said. Sit down!”

Before she could utter her feeble protest he had made her obey him. He took her hands, dragging them gently towards him so that she must see his face, its every fleeting expression.

“Yes, it’s going to hurt,” he began murmuringly. “But it’s like having your head off; it can only hurt once. Anyhow, you don’t have to tell me anything. I know! And if I’m wrong, I’m not the only one, Jennie. . . . Yes, sometimes I itch to smash their comic faces, but there it is! You’d better have it! They’re thinking, talking . . . those snooty, clever hags . . . those——”

“Don’t!” she cried. “Stop!”

Yet . . . “What on earth are you talking about?” she could still think to fling at him.

He ignored that speech, smilingly, calmly, as one would deal with a too rebellious child. Gently he went on.

“Well, we don’t have to talk about ’em. They’re totally unimportant. Let’s deal with the things that matter. We’ve got to get you out of here . . . beat ’em to it . . . get you away. And, Jennie, no one need ever know—only ourselves. America, Jennie . . . you and I. We could marry directly we landed . . . San Francisco. And I wouldn’t muscle in too heavily; I swear it. I’d understand, Jennie. Your kid . . .

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*his!* You could do as you like—divorce me if you wanted to. But you'd be safe . . . married . . . no one would ever know."

She released herself suddenly, tense beneath the indescribable conflict of her emotions.

"Do you know what you're saying?" she demanded, but that pitiful attempt at anger failed her. Bewildered, she stared at him, while softly, unperturbed, he smiled.

"You. . . . Another man's child?" she whispered. Incredible! Obliterating! It left one dumb.

## X

He would never know why now she was packing her belongings and leaving him; he would never understand the secret, precipitate flight that denied him even a word of farewell. True, he might decently try to ascribe it to her grief and her memories; he might even fear vaguely that because of them he had insulted her. But the effort would be beyond him. He might only think at last that she had found him unworthy . . . small and cheap and puny; undeserving of her serious thought. And though he had declared his love for her, what of it? How could she resent it? For it asked nothing more of her than the belief in his reverence of her, his patience, his restraint. . . . "You could do as you like—divorce me if you wanted to!" he had cried. . . . Yes, surely now he would deem her cold and hard and selfish; yet, more than that—someone

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who, having been permitted to see his noblest aspirations, could only mock them.

And she might trust him. But, no! She must try not to remember what he had said. Too mean of her, too despicable! One did not let a man break himself on the rack of his own chivalry. There was his career, his future, the hard-earned place in the world of men which so courageously he was planning. . . . Marriage, the abandoning of all his dreams, the anonymous mediocrity thereafter! There would surely come a day when he hated her.

But there was another thing—bigger, more vital in its challenge to the imagination, more elemental in its appeal to the senses. One did not seek a man as one might seek a priest or doctor. One let him come at one—free, animal, untroubled! So that pain or need or despair must be hidden from him; hidden as one would hide a blemish on one's cheek, or—if one might risk bathos—a hole in one's stocking! Yes, and that might be the secret of it all. . . . One asked not a man's pity, but left him careless, unburdened. Only thus might he remain to give one's life its salt, its savour; to colour one's days. . . . Man who hurled himself at the mocking, elusive laugh, yet shrank from the first acquisitive clutch at him. Man, the wild, maned hunter; the priest or doctor never!

Yet she paused, doubting that thought. What if he sought the priest or doctor too?

She fell to wondering what would happen to him when she had gone. He would keep faith with himself,



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she knew, but—two years! It was a long time, and she fancied that he hated China already. Perhaps he did not hate the real China; more likely he hated the fevered, artificial semblance of it which his fellow white men had made for him. She remembered his occasional jests at their expense; at the way they herded themselves together within the high protective walls of their compounds; their desperate attempt to transplant within those walls the civilization which they had left behind, as though all that was alien to it were insult or a menace. . . . “Smug little schoolgirls,” he had said. “But afraid of the yellow man’s dark.” . . . And he had sneered a little at the intensity of their pleasures, their nightly “drunks” that eased the ache of exile. . . . “Half of them aren’t living at all, Jennie. They’ve stupefied themselves; they’re merely *killing* time . . . drowning it . . . blotting out China until they can escape from it with the few thousand dollars they’ve made.”

It was probably an unfair picture that he had painted; at least, an exaggerated one. But it would serve to show how little of happiness those two years might yield him. He would hold himself apart, alone; his might be an exile more terrible than that exile which he affected to despise. Strong as he was, she feared for him.

Which was why she must leave him, quickly, before it was too late. . . . “Do I love him? No, ridiculous, absurd!” she had stormily answered herself a score of times already. “It’s only that I’m grateful to him, admire him. Yet I’m sorry for him, I’m afraid for



him. God, why did I have to meet him . . . here . . . now?"

Yes, she must go! For, to fear for a man was to pity him; and to pity him was to take him up and put him in one's heart. Whereafter the heart was like a big, warm house that, on one's thoughtless impulse, had given a night's shelter to a starving, piteous-eyed dog. "Tomorrow, when the rain is done and the sun shines, I'll send it away," one had said. But on that morrow one had gone and built the fire again . . . and many fires . . . so that, when at last the rain was done, Logic had been banished instead.

Yet she fought with herself even now. "Life goes on—yes, it's got to go on!" she had said, and it was to him that she uttered it. And was it not true? . . . Life went on, its griefs receding like departing ships. Hallowed, they might inhabit the memory for a while; for all time, perhaps. But they went; one could not call them back. Meanwhile, Life had cried a thousand times, "You thirst, you hunger," until at last one heeded it. And, in six months' time, she must heed that cry more urgently; her child, the matter-of-fact necessity that bade grief depart. . . . What if she escaped him only to cast herself on someone else; someone less understanding, less worthy?

"Yes, you're a hypocrite," she reproached herself. "A cheap theatrical hypocrite. Why don't you go to him . . . thank him . . . honour him?"

But again must live those doubts; the pride, the fears, the inhibitions! His career; her memories; the wild, maned hunter!

At which, lest she change her mind once more, she went to the bell.

"Yes, boy!" she exclaimed to the Chinese who answered her. "I'm ready, quite ready. Take my bags, get a car. . . . What's that? '*Plenty time!*' Yes, I know! But take 'em now . . . quickly . . . get car!"

At last it was done. The train was bearing her away. She could utter it now, and for that first time be sure of herself. . . . She was going away only because her man was dead; because no more she might find him there. Her man; her fine man still; her fine man ever!

Only that! Might she die if it were not her heart's own truth.

"Leith, forgive me!"

## XI

She had been in Shanghai nearly a month. It was late November; autumn was drawing to its close. The mists swirled in from the river, poking their long grey fingers into the canyon-like streets, hustling the shortening days into premature night. But the mists and the night were one with the mood that was on her. They cloaked one; mercifully they hid one from the too inquiring day; like the swathed, cautious beggars of the side-walks one was grateful to them.

Why she had come to Shanghai so unthinkingly she could not say. True, the vast commercial quarter of its modern International Settlement might offer her a reasonable chance of finding employment, even though Andrew Pavey had warned her to the contrary; but

she had surely been reckless. Once in Bubbling Well Road she had almost come face to face with one of Leith's own friends; and, again, with Nanking only a day's journey away by river and less than half a day by rail, there was always the possibility of an embarrassing meeting with someone who imagined probably that she was on her way back to England. How might she greet Mrs. Bender, for instance? Perhaps even there would one day be a chance encounter with Andrew Pavey himself.

And always could Shanghai be as a whip to her memories. Her first sight of the Bund, where Leith Macalister had landed with her from the tender, had been like the stab of a knife; and when, unexpectedly, she had glimpsed the Palace Hotel from the interior of a taxi, her hurt was such that she cried out aloud. Yes, there was hardly a place that might not call him to mind . . . the Canidrome where on their first night together they had danced; the little park-like enclosure by Garden Bridge where they would get a breath of air before breakfast; North Szechuan Road, where he grinned at the din of its honky-tonks; the store where in such schoolboyish confusion he had purchased her wedding-ring. Yet these reminders of him could solace as well as hurt. She might never cross a street without the vague feeling that he took her arm and helped her. A dozen times a day she could recapture his voice, his laugh, the quizzical, teasing uplift of his brows. Yes, because it had been theirs, he *endured* there.

But sometimes she must forget him for a while.

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Breakfasting early in the modest apartment-house to which she had gone for shelter, she would go out seeking employment.

## XII

It had not been easy at first to frame the story that would convince a prospective employer; but now, so often had she uttered it, that she could almost delude herself that it was true.

"I'm a widow," she might begin, as she carefully seated herself beside a business man's desk. "And I ought to be frank with you. I don't need this job for more than a couple of months or so. After that—well, I shall probably be returning to England."

And if sometimes she became aware of an inquisitive stare at her, she was no longer capable of resentment.

"Why not?" she had long ago comforted herself. "They're business men, serious men, the only men I want to meet. They're entitled to think twice about me."

But, unfailingly, her appeal would evoke the same reply. Disappointed, she would go away. Andrew Pavey had been right!

When she had exhausted her round of the big syndicates and stores, she turned her attentions to the smaller business men, and it seemed at first that she might be successful. More at ease because she could approach them less formally, she was making a better



impression, she felt. But again she was to be reminded of Andrew Pavey's pessimism. If a man were ready to give her immediate employment, he offered only what the "pin-money" girls were accustomed to accept; such a pittance that, as Pavey had warned her, it would hardly provide her with a room and breakfast. While now, because of that greater informality with which she sought these men, she had to be prepared for an occasional insult.

There was the man who, full of promises to speak on her behalf to his various friends, took her to lunch.

"No, you don't have to worry," he tried to assure her. "Directly I come back from that little trip to Hong Kong! But what about making that little trip with me, Mrs. Davidson? And I'm not the sort of man to make any terms, my dear. I'd—well, I'd just leave it to you . . . how you felt about me, and so on. A man couldn't say fairer than that; could he, my dear?"

Or, if the majority of them were of better stuff, then, there were those who could embarrass one by their very decency.

She remembered the genial little man who, while unable to help her, had pressed a twenty-dollar bill into her hand.

"No, take it . . . take it, my dear, and forget it," he insisted. "Don't be a little fool. And if you're still out of a job next week, come and see me again. A promise now!"

But one might never keep such promises.



## XIII

If sometimes she felt herself succumbing to fear or despair, she usually succeeded in recapturing cheerfulness with the reflection that she could blame no one for her present position except herself. She could blame only her pride, her stubborn independence. Salvation would be hers as soon as she cared to abandon those fetishes. Yes, there was still her father; in a lesser way, there was still Andrew Pavey; also, as her father had recently reminded her, there was her dead lover's own family.

Though she did not consider it necessary to tell her father of her condition, she had informed him of Leith's death almost immediately. The news must undoubtedly have shocked him, for his answering letter was so affectionately consoling and so completely silent on the subject of his own woes that she reproached herself for not confessing everything. His next letter, which arrived very soon afterwards, was in more practical vein, however.

*This dastardly killing of a white man must not go unpunished [he wrote with his usual extravagance]. One hopes that our diplomatic people will register a strong protest to the Chinese government, as well as demand adequate financial compensation both for yourself and this young man's family. By the way, you ought to let me have their address. I could support them very forcibly over here in making representations*

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*to the Foreign Office on your behalf. But, fortunately, the Macalisters are by no means poor, I am informed. Which tempts me to suggest that, until we can wring something out of these ghastly Chinese, the Macalisters may like to make themselves responsible for your welfare. Perhaps, indeed, they have already written you on this point. If they have not, however, and you shrink from approaching them personally, you have only to say the word and give me their address and I will suitably write them. . . ."*

She had smiled as she read this. . . . "Poor father, how hard you try!" ran her amused, indulgent thought of him. But, if he dreamed that her bereavement might eventually yield him a few more bottles of whisky a week, he would be disappointed. It was true that a note of protest and a demand for compensation had been lodged with the *Wai Chiao Pu*, as the Chinese Foreign Office styled itself, but, her consul had informed her, the chances of redress were one in a million. . . . "A mix-up between soldiers and so-called 'Communist' bandits," was the consul's comment. "Most likely a stray bullet. Yes, to prove that it was anything but an accident will be difficult. And can one object if they blame the bandits?" . . . As for her father's information that the Macalisters were rich, she knew it to be wrong. They were gentlepeople, but the War and its financial aftermath had left them woefully impoverished.

However (she might one day enlighten her father)

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she and the Macalisters had already exchanged correspondence. Their letter, written after she cabled them with news of Leith's death, was full of genuine concern for her. "You must come here and stay with us, directly you land," they had said, and they had pleaded that she would allow them to bear the expenses of her homeward journey. "And please always continue to think of us as your *relatives*," they had insisted. "Don't be afraid to confide your troubles and problems to us, whatever they are."

Whatever they were! But she had not told them. She had given as her excuse for remaining in China merely the lie that she was accepting the hospitality of some of Leith's friends. And if they wrote again to her, their letter would, in all probability, be returned to them undelivered, for they knew only her address at the Yangtse Hotel in Nanking.

Would she ever tell them the truth? she asked herself now. Perhaps she would; perhaps, indeed, they had a *right* to know that truth, deeming it as precious to them as it was to her.

But not yet . . . not yet! Pride and courage were precious too.

#### XIV

She had moved again, seeking cheaper lodgings out beyond the International Settlement in a quarter where smells, "poor whites", and the better-class Chinese mingled in intimate equality. The floor below her



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housed the wife and many children of a Cantonese bartender, his rare visits to them from the hotel where he worked and slept being the occasions for much noisy quarrelling; sometimes to emphasize his arguments he brought with him a sing-song girl from one of the tea-houses. On the floor above her lived a red-haired Russian woman from whose cigarette-shop in the squalid Chapei district one might buy opium. She was rich, it was said, but for one in her particular trade the mask of poverty might be safer. Lately, a few of her fellow drug-traffickers had faced the executioner. There was another Russian in the same house, a man who could be heard screaming in his sleep. One knew not for certain why he screamed, but once he had gained his living by sniping the "white swans"—the Chinese fur-trappers of the far North—and robbing them of their spoils. While, to give the house a precarious respectability, there were those whose only demerit was poverty itself—the elderly unemployed German baker and his wife; a Serbian musician from one of the cabarets; the consumptive Frenchman with a Chinese wife who believed that he was Rousseau.

There was also Dora Lenskaya, the little Russian seamstress, who occupied the next room.

It was perhaps because of Dora Lenskaya that one could laugh, or put away fear for a while, or, on the uplift of a second glass of Harbin vodka, swear that the morrow would be rosier even than today. Said Dora Lenskaya when first she had heard that story, "Please, another drink! Nothing is too bad when you

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have laughed at it. Please . . . sit down . . . drink. Think no more of anything bad until you say 'Good health'." It was Dora Lenskaya, too, who offered Jennie the first opportunity of making her living. . . . "These dresses! So many dresses I sew. Please, you must help me," she begged. "Only am I sad for your fingers. So beautiful your fingers; a man would kiss them."

It was good that Dora could afford to pay her for hand-finishing the dresses. It could shut out people's inquisitive stares or the embarrassed turning away of their heads. It could shut out the rain and the hard, commercial hint of the day. When the short wintry afternoon was drawing to a close and Dora's tall, coke-fed stove began to glow red-hot in the dusk, Dora's mood would grow wide and warm and protective like a great cloak about one. And where was the ill that she could not find compensation for; where was the fault that she could not condone?

"Sure! Many Russian girl have baby," she would begin consolingly. "It is because they have *horoshia siertsia* . . . good heart! . . . Because they do not like to see a man weep. *Da, da! Pravda!* . . . Because man is like baby himself."

And then, though it might be for the tenth time, she would tell again the history of her own meagre years. . . . Her mother, leaving behind her the corpse of a murdered husband, had fled from Siberia into Manchuria from the fury of the Revolution—Dora herself an uncomprehending child. To get bread



for them, her mother had been the mistress of a Chinese general; then, in a wild reaction of remorse, committing suicide. . . . "But why, but why?" Dora would comment on this philosophically. "I too have men. When I am fifteen, I sleep with Japanese. He give me supper—and his gloves. *Neechivo! Mas kee!* If girl is afraid to die, she must do this thing.

"But now I sew dresses," she would conclude, as though she uttered of a great triumph. "It is better. Yes, now I sleep alone. . . . *Kak dama!* How do you say? Like big lady, aristocrat. . . . Jennia, little Jennia, I think you sew dresses too!"

And a ripe contentment would be on Dora. She would look to the glow of her stove, she would get up and draw the curtains, grimacing contemptuously at the winter gloom beyond her window. "*Amah!*" she would cry to her Chinese needle-woman. "*Podjaluista*, give tea!"

But often as Jennie sat listening to her, she would ask herself unhappily how much she might be imposing on the little Russian exile's charity. True, she worked long and faithfully for Dora, often until her finger-tips were sore and her eyes ached; nevertheless, she felt sure that Dora was paying her more than she actually earned. In some of her more pessimistic moments she would sometimes give voice to this suspicion.

"Dora," came once her protest, "this isn't fair to you. You're being kinder to me than you are to yourself. And you don't even want me to spend the money

you give me. Why must it always be *your* food, *your* drink . . . *your* coke on the fire?"

Dora Lenskaya shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"Two people may sit by the fire as cheap as one," she retorted as she bent over her work.

Yet sometimes she must gain her point a little more desperately.

"Sure!" she exclaimed one night when Jennie had been more than usually restless. "If you would like to find new job, why not? Perhaps tomorrow we go together and look. Yes, there are plenty jobs, even for girl a long time with baby. She can go like red-haired woman Shura downstairs and sell opium. She can find drunken captain from sea and steal his money. She can meet big business man and say 'Give me money, or I speak with your wife.' "

And then artlessly she added it: "Which job do we find for you?"

At which, ashamed suddenly of her stupidity, Jennie sought the other girl's arms and wept.

"I'm a fool," she cried, "an ungrateful fool. I'll stay here with you . . . make dresses . . . be happy with you. And I'll sink my foolish pride. Yes, Dora, tomorrow I'll write that letter to Leith's people. Perhaps I'll send them a cable."

The little Russian girl could smile again. She went to the door and noisily ordered supper. . . . "*Amah! Zakuska! Vodka!*" . . . She glanced to reassure herself that the stove was red.

. . . "*Horosho!*" she exclaimed excitedly to Jennie. "You

stay here, good! We sew dresses. We are very happy. We want only food . . . warm room . . . a little drink. *Amah, kuei-ti, kuei-ti. Zakuska! Vodka!*”

But to that talk of Leith Macalister's family she answered nothing. . . . They were good people; she would not doubt it. But what if in their goodness they took English Jennie away from her?

The stove would seem less warm.

## XV

But sometimes, when night had fallen, Dora would grimace at the stove and suggest that they go out together. “Sure, it is dark!” she would say reassuringly. “And you can wear my big coat.” . . . They would go then to one of the cinemas, or, if the weather were fine, take rickshaws to the Japanese quarter, where, in a restaurant, they sat cross-legged while the picturesque attired serving-girls knelt before them and fried savoury-smelling *sukiyaki*.

Occasionally, if Dora were away talking business with one of the various people who employed her, Jennie would go out alone; though first must the *amah* give solemn warning as to the perils of insufficient clothing, and the Chinese “boy” make ponderous inquiry into her rickshaw coolie's respectability. Then, and confident that the generous collar of Dora's coat of Siberian fur would protect her in a chance encounter with someone whom she knew, she emerged from the gloomy suburb into the sophisticated modernity of the

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International Settlement. She could always thrill to that scene. There, like any emancipated schoolgirl, she indulged her town-bred fancy in the noise and blaze of its traffic-haunted streets; their colour; their tense, impetuous movement. So little did they seem like the yellow man's China; so much like the West of her own forsaking. She saw the hotels, the shop-windows, the familiar international publicity of the cinemas; the illuminated towers of the big departmental stores held the sky like the garish creations of an Atlantic coast fun-city. And, if these things wrung one with a deep and passionate nostalgia, they comforted too. The sound of a cockney voice filtering unexpectedly through the ventilator of an hotel bar was like a great friendly hand on one's shoulder.

But sometimes, when that sensation of solace was most heavily upon her, she would grow suddenly suspicious of it. "Why am I here?" she would challenge herself. "This place . . . this *drug* . . . the days and weeks slipping by!" Mentally she would look back, striving to examine each thought and deed of hers that had marked those days and weeks. Coldly, grimly she would do it, like a surgeon probing the wound that is in danger of healing too soon. And always this exercise could leave her miserable.

She reproached herself now that she had dallied so long in China. If her thought had originally been to protect Leith and herself from scandal, then she should have left the place immediately, decently, like any other bereaved woman. She should have gone to her



father, her sister. Or if the charity of strangers was less distasteful than that of her own people, she should have sought it a little more quickly, more humbly; her pride and squeamishness should never have been. But most conspicuously had she erred in translating the needs of her unborn child so unthinkingly into her own. "It is not my own life that I'm preserving," she upbraided herself. "It's *his*! His, only his! What the world says of me doesn't matter. It doesn't even matter what they say of Leith. And here I am wasting time, like a fool, a coward."

So deeply was that self-reproach upon her that, one night, as she reached the Settlement, she impulsively made her rickshaw coolie halt. Too drugging was that sense of effortless movement. She must get out and walk. She must seek the antidote of her own physical strivings; the hard reality of the side-walk beneath her heels. She walked for over half an hour; then, because she could walk no more, she paused—wondering if she might dare to enter an hotel and rest for a while.

Yet her tiredness would hardly matter. She could laugh at it. For had she not just made her decision? Tomorrow, because thought and being and destiny belonged to the child within her, and only to him, she was burying her pride, and for all time. Confessing the truth, sparing nothing, she would write to her father, to Leith's relatives; to anyone indeed who might help her in that decision. Tomorrow, also, she would beg her way back to England from the consular people. Their questions would leave her undismayed.



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And then she started beneath an emotion half of joy, half of fear. Standing by the entrance of the adjacent hotel was Andrew Pavey, in conversation with another man. Probably, as the day was Saturday, he had just arrived from Nanking for the week-end. But he looked pale, ill. Perhaps he had come to see a doctor; and it smote her conscience now that, since her flight from Nanking, she had sent him only one letter, telling him nothing of her plans or her reasons for leaving him so quickly, but merely offering him her brief and inadequate thanks.

Yet to think of him thus was dangerous. It might banish all her fine decision and leave her floundering as miserably as she had done in all those wasted weeks. And if again he proposed marriage to her, as undoubtedly he would, it would help her none the more. Marriage with him would be *his* life, *hers*; the finer, sterner resolution would be swept away in that sea of apologetic gratitude to him; she might never recover it; she could never dare to try. . . .

“Leith! Leith! For God’s sake, help me!”

Then, because Pavey had turned his head in her direction, she plunged suddenly from the side-walk into the traffic, seeking to cross the road before he recognized her. Perhaps he had done so already. She did not know. She was too occupied for a moment in threading a precarious way through that frightening jumble of cars and rickshaws. But when she had almost reached the opposite side-walk she dared to glance over her shoulder and look back. At which she could breathe

her thanks. He and the other man were entering the hotel. She had escaped him.

And then she heard a screaming of automobile brakes; her own cry; voices about her that dwindled and died.

BOOK THREE

“FREEDOM IS A MAN!”



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## I

At last did her lonely, questing thoughts find earthly place for their trekking. Inquisitive, like one long absent from a scene, she opened her eyes again; the doctors pronounced her out of danger. But now was the winter passing, the old year far behind. In the streets, the rickshaw coolies were unwrapping their swathed feet and discarding their long, padded gowns. With the first bout of sunshine might come spring.

"Yes, yes!" they answered her. "You're here . . . Shanghai . . . the hospital. *Your baby?* . . . Yes, of course, but quiet . . . quiet . . . you mustn't talk. That's a good girl. Try to sleep."

The spring came, breaking out all in a day, it seemed. The sap seized the willows; cool, frosty almond-blossom held the park. There came Easter, the nervous, palpitating Easter of the American or European wherein he played golf a little more, drank a little more, and cursed its brevity. There came the Russian Easter following it; the poorer, heartier time of coloured eggs, of *zakuska*, of swift gulpings from tiny glasses of vodka. . . . "Christ is risen!" one must say, and forget poverty for a day, forget exile. "*Da, da!* Christ is risen, indeed." One ran into one's neighbor's house and kissed him. . . . The sun blazed, the almond blossom died; soon might one hate the summer heat.



"Yes, you had an accident," they told her. "Concussion. A few broken bones. What's that? A baby? Whose baby? . . . *Oh yes!*"

Indeed, they had almost forgotten it. But now they might tell her. Her baby was never born. Too precarious had been that breath of life for two of them to subsist upon it. One of them was no more.

"Never born?" she whispered unbelievably.

At which they smiled and nodded, searching their memories, reassuring themselves that they had not been wrong about her . . . Jennie Davidson, a woman unmarried, from the Russian quarter.

"Well!" they exclaimed, and shrugged their shoulders sagely, and smiled again, and moved away.

A few tears might do her good.

## II

Only two people came to visit her—an overworked hospital chaplain and faithful Dora Lenskaya. And, in all that time during which she lay unconscious, only three letters had come for her, these being from her father, and reaching her only because, just before her accident, she had given him her new address. Other and probably more important letters had surely been sent to her at Nanking, but she was hardly likely to receive them now; they would long ago have been returned to their senders. Her father's last letter, incidentally, was many weeks old, and definitely it expressed his displeasure with her. Perhaps, as she had

ignored so many of his appeals for money, he would not write her again.

But it seemed strange at first that Andrew Pavey had not found her there, for her accident had been reported in all the newspapers, she discovered from a nurse. It was possible, however, that he did not often read the Shanghai newspapers, though they were to be found in any Nanking club or home. Anyhow, and whatever the explanation, he had not come, nor written. She could not be sorry—not even now.

The days passed. Hobbling with a stick, she could now seek the hospital grounds, where in the shade of a tree Dora Lenskaya would sometimes sit and chat to her. And so studiously bright could Dora's chatter be, telling never of hurt or grief or misfortune or hunger, but only of the good things that had happened to people, or the things that one might laugh at. . . . The unemployed German baker had won a prize in a sweepstake, for instance. Sarah Eiter, the big woman who lived next door, had curbed her husband's infidelity by hiding his only pair of trousers. But sometimes must Dora abandon that chatter, delivering herself of a pardonable curiosity.

What were Jennie's plans for the future? she had to ask.

At which Jennie's smile would falter and flee, and her thoughts go precipitately back to that moment when they had uttered it. . . . Her baby dead! Never born!

“I don't know,” she once answered, and her gaze

was unseeing, remote. "Perhaps I'll go home; perhaps I'll stay here and find work. It doesn't matter—at least, not until they let me out of here. . . . But, Dora, tell me! What do they do with babies that aren't properly born? They wouldn't tell me."

"But I am worried for you," the little seamstress protested one day. "You can't think always of him or baby. You must think of tomorrow too. Yesterday is pain, tomorrow is happiness—yes, like a tooth out. Yesterday is finished. Perhaps you let me speak to British Consul for you."

Jennie checked her sigh and smiled.

"Perhaps," she agreed. "But why must tomorrow be better than yesterday, only because it has no pain? Pain can be *living . . . feeling . . . progressing somewhere.*"

But she would not continue that argument. Dora might not understand, and had not her faithful heart been wrung enough already? It must be wrung no more. When next Dora came she must be rewarded only with laughter, cheerfulness, gratitude.

"See!" she surprised her one afternoon. "I've written to my sister. You can read the letter—yes, and post it for me. No, I haven't told her a thing, except that I've had an accident. She wouldn't like it; she thinks I'm fool enough already. But I've said I may be home in the autumn. I've asked her to find me a job to do."

"Good! And those other people—the parents of Mr. Macalister?"

“Well, it doesn’t matter now, does it?” Jennie retorted, though she still must suppress a wince of pain. “I mean, I can’t very well ask them for money if I’ve no one to support except myself.

“Still,” she added reassuringly, “if you think I ought to keep up correspondence with them, I will. Er—yes, I’ll write them tomorrow—tonight.”

At which the Russian girl was happy.

“Good! Good!” she exclaimed, and wept a little. “You go back . . . your father, your sister . . . you find job. You laugh again. All is happy like story-book. . . . And one day too you find good man.”

But Jennie shook her head. Her smile was gone.

“No!” she whispered absently. “Not that! Not that!”

And yet she reproached herself again. Why sadden Dora with things which she herself could only half express?

She laughed suddenly and noisily, though striving not to be too hypocritical.

“Dora, believe me, I don’t yet know my own mind. How can I? . . . But, another man? Why wish more trouble on me? Dora, I’m free. Let’s be content with that. I’m free.”

She laughed again.

“Give me a cigarette,” she exclaimed.

But, surprisingly, the little Russian seamstress did not share that laughter. Freedom! Her Slavonic soul must ponder that word. Freedom! It was a mighty word for a woman to be uttering. One might only



whisper it respectfully, tentatively, as one breathed of an immeasurable and unknown deity.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Free!" she echoed. "Well, you are English—different, perhaps. But, Woman is never free. Only Man is free—because he thinks with stomach and not heart. Yes, freedom has a beard, my mother did say. Freedom is a man!"

### III

The summer had come; swift, staggering, like the suddenly released blast of air from a furnace. It was a city of sloth and thirst and whirring electric fans; of half-checked smells and sudden, acute illness. A little prematurely they released Jennie Davidson from hospital, advising her to escape the heat and seek a sea-beach. In any event, they needed her bed. She thanked them gravely; then went back to the unventilated suburb with Dora Lenskaya.

But the Russian girl would not let her work any more.

"No, no, you are still sick, and there is money," she said. "See, I have sold your best dresses. Girls did like them because they were new and from London. But you do not stay too long. Too hot it is here. When do you see British Consul?"

That question, asked so often, could bring Jennie face to face with reality, yet a reality which, strangely, she had always striven to avoid.

"Yes, I suppose I must go back," she murmured



now, but she hardly heard herself speak. . . . They'll have put the stone upon his grave,” ran her absent thoughts.

But Dora's voice was rousing her.

“*Tshort!*” came her practical misinterpretation of that silence. “If you are afraid to ask consul for money, I will ask him instead.”

Jennie smiled and pinched her cheek.

“I'm not afraid of him. Probably he's a very charming man, and I could always retain the—er—imperishable British dignity by promising to repay him. But what a waste of money on one miserable woman, especially if she didn't happen to be happy in England. Why couldn't I get a job and try to be happy here, for instance?”

At which she knew Dora's fierce scorn.

“Here!” she echoed as she wiped her glistening brow. “Such heat, such smells, such Chinese everywhere! Poof! This country that you hate . . . this country that has killed your man.”

“Perhaps I don't hate it, Dora,” she whispered.

“Perhaps, because of him, I *can't* hate it,” she almost added.

“But *could* she have added it?” she asked herself next. . . . The days and weeks and months that sped one on with them! The griefs receding like departed ships!

She would not trust herself to speak then; but later she had made her decision. And she would not depart from it, she promised herself.

"Happiness can be *anywhere*, Dora," she said, musingly. "In a bog; in a dungeon; sitting on top of a pole—if you like sitting on top of a pole. Still, until it takes me by surprise, I think I'll pursue the practical course. I'll go back. I'll pretend that a woman's mission in life is catching trains, tapping typewriters. Yes, even if that consul man wants to send me home by steerage, I'll let him. I'll go and see him today."

#### IV

When that evening she entered the friendly-looking compound of the British Consulate-General, she discovered that its offices had long ago been closed for the day. She smiled at herself for her foolishness, but she would go there again in the morning, she resolved. Then, drawn by the ever-fascinating spectacle of the waterfront, she lingered on the Bund for a while, gazing out to the great grey hulks of the various European battleships, and the distant liners lower down the river's reach. While, nearer, were the fussy tenders and launches that served them; the strange-sailed native junks going out on the tide; the straining, oared sampans breasting the choppy, yellow flood like rakish-moving water-spiders.

But it was hot; still too hot, despite the hint of sunset. She pitied her fellow white men who, notwithstanding their suits of "palm-beach" or linen, must adhere to their townish collars and ties. Presently, when she had crossed Garden Bridge and saw the Astor

House Hotel, she could not resist the temptation to seek its cool interior and order a soft drink. And if anyone recognized her—Leith’s friends, or someone from Nanking—it would hardly matter now. She was free, she had boasted to Dora; in a few days, a week or two at the most, she was going home. Yes, if only she could banish those ghosts of the yesterday, Freedom might be better after all.

But could she banish them? Instead of a soft drink, she amateurishly ordered a gin-sling.

She had not been there long when she became aware of a man seated alone at the next table. She judged his age to be about thirty-eight, his nationality English. He wore a new dinner-jacket, and she frowned a little at the flower in its lapel. But he looked harmless and friendly, though once or twice he had sought to meet her gaze. Presently, however, he surprised her by getting up and approaching her.

“Excuse me,” he said, “but I saw you up at the hospital last week. I was there, visiting a—well, a girl who works for me. You were sitting under a tree, and I——”

He checked himself, slightly abashed by her surprised, defensive stare.

“Well,” he concluded precipitately, “I’m glad to see you out again. You looked kind of lonely up there.”

At which her embarrassment was forgotten. She had heard the voice of her native London; and, notwithstanding his dinner-clothes, a very homely and workaday London too! In just that same accent might

she have been addressed by a milk-roundsman or a bus-conductor.

Because his presence was so amusingly perplexing, she bade him sit down.

"So, you're from London!" she said. "Which part?"

He reddened suddenly, so that later she reproached herself for the thoughtlessness of that speech. . . .

"Well, I'm English, but I've been around," he was defending himself awkwardly. "South America, the States, Canada, Japan!"

And then abruptly he delivered himself of that confession.

"Yes, I'm from London! But how did you know it?"

She smiled indulgently. She must not hurt him.

"Well," she began gently, "you sound just a little *like* a Londoner . . . a word here and there, I mean. And only a Londoner would have the—well, the courage to address himself to an unknown woman, and—and yet not offer his name. Mine is Davidson—Jennie Davidson."

At which he reddened again.

"The name is Hinty—Daniel Hinty," he answered and fished in his pockets as though he might be seeking a card-case. "But don't ask me to be proud of being a Cockney. I'm trying to forget it. Out here it don't get you nowhere. If a man's going to get on, it's swank . . . side . . . and plenty of it! If they think you're dirt, the other white folks here won't look at you. Yes, I'm aiming big; I mean to. And that's the



only way of doing it. . . . What about a drink?"

Jennie could not take offense at his obvious friendliness. She thanked him gravely. "But a coffee this time, if you please. Mr. Hinty, what is your work out here, may I ask?"

He paused for a moment; then, grinning, he made answer.

"Well, perhaps you wouldn't call it work at all, though it keeps me busy enough. I've got a cabaret up in Tsingtao. You know the sort of place I mean . . . stage-turns; a dance-band; Russian partners for the boys who come in on the spree.

"But perhaps you haven't been to one," he added hastily. "No, I guess you haven't. Anyhow, I've been down here looking for new girls . . . singers . . . solo-dancers . . . Russians, of course. I'm taking 'em back with me next week. With a bit of luck this season, I'll make it the finest show in Tsingtao."

"Tsingtao! I don't know it," she said, at which he smiled gratefully, and plunged into that garrulous information.

"It's up in the Yellow Sea, about four hundred miles from here. The Germans built it . . . fine brick houses, hotels, shops, promenades, a pier. Then, during the War, the Japs pinched it. After that, the League of Nations pinched it . . . gave it back to the Chinks. And a fine mess they're making of it. Still, it's better than here. . . . Yes, the finest cabaret in Tsingtao."

Yet he frowned suddenly; at his plump, somewhat



nervous hands, the flower in his coat, the people drifting in to take cocktails.

"Huh, but sometimes I hate it!" he declared. "This afternoon I was nearly chucking it up . . . selling out . . . moving on. What's the good of making pots of money if you're getting nothing out of it?"

It was a starveling sort of utterance to be giving him, but she could think of nothing better.

"It depends on what you're looking for."

At which he frowned again.

"I'm looking for something I'm never likely to find in *Hinty's Cabaret*," he answered.

She did not understand. She let him talk on.

"Sure, I've got enough to live on," he continued bitterly. "Plenty! But it spoils you, makes you discontented, greedy for more. . . . No, not for more money; for something money can't buy."

He paused. He tried to grin.

"I guess you wouldn't understand," he exclaimed. "You couldn't. But I'll tell you something, and I'll risk your laugh. Ever since I was able to read a book or a newspaper I've dreamed that money would give me the sort of things that go with money . . . breeding . . . education . . . the polished article. Me! Danny Hinty! Yes, and now you'd better have it. My mother was an Islington washerwoman . . . used to keep me indoors most of the evening, turning the blinking mangle for her.

"And that's the milk in the coconut," he concluded with a grim little laugh at himself. "Danny Hinty,

the washerwoman's son—trying to be a gentleman.”

“Why not?” she murmured, but he shook his head.

“Why not?” he echoed. “But you haven't seen the grin on people's faces when the washerwoman's son puts on a dress-suit and tries to be as good as they are. You haven't felt what it is to catch yourself dropping an aitch in front of 'em. No, it doesn't work! You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. . . . And that's why sometimes I say I'm chucking it all.”

Yet to sympathize with him would hardly help him, she decided.

“Really, Mr. Hinty, you're suffering from a big dose of inferiority complex,” she chided him laughingly. “Blame the heat. And I'm sure that people think nothing of the sort about you—at least, not the right people. As for the others—well, they're only those whose opinions don't matter two hoots. Gosh! If we all talked like wireless announcers what a ghastly, treacly world this would be. Yes, you've got to see it through, Mr. Hinty. Don't worry about anything except being your natural self. An ounce of cheerful honesty is worth all the so-called breeding in the world.”

At which slowly he grinned his gratitude.

“Well, I'm glad you think so,” he said. “They don't matter two hoots, eh? Nice expression—*two hoots!* Just the sort of talk they use themselves. Two hoots! But, if only I could have you up there and let a few of 'em hear you say it. . . . God, if only you were my sister, say!”

And then he fell abashed.

"Sorry," he exclaimed. "That's hardly the way to talk to you, I guess."

She laughed. "Don't apologize. I think I understand," she said. "But, Mr. Hinty, perhaps your only trouble is that you're lonely. I'd been hoping to hear you were married."

He grinned again, yet he could give her his discreetly searching glance.

"So, you think I'd make a fist of it—a success, I mean?" he demanded almost boisterously.

"Yes, why not?"

"And what about that girl you went to see in hospital last week?" she could not resist adding teasingly. "I think I saw you. You were taking her some flowers."

"Nadya! Nadya Skolnikova!" he uttered. "Yes, she came down here for an operation—appendicitis. Been with me for a long time now—ever since I started the racket."

He was thoughtfully silent for a moment; then he gave her his frank, smiling gaze again.

"Forget it. There's nothing in it," he assured her. "No, the sort of girl who'd marry me is the girl I don't particularly want. And the right sort? . . . Well, I'd be aiming too 'igh—too high. I guess I'll wait until I've lost a few of my rough edges."

And then, seeing her look at her watch, he laughed.

"My God, I'm as cheerful as a wet Sunday. You'll be thinking I'm always feeling sorry for myself. And I'm keeping you. Anyhow, it was good of you, Miss

Davidson. You've cheered me up. I'm going to take your advice . . . see it through. I'm not going to care *two hoots!* . . . Two hoots! Yes, it sounds good.”

Yet, encouraged by her relieved smile, he lingered; giving her his silent, dog-like admiration in a gaze that was almost ludicrous.

“I guess I bore you, but see me again,” he suddenly begged.

She was getting up to go.

“I don't think I can,” she answered. “You see, in a few days' time I'm probably going back to England.”

His optimistic grin died.

“England, eh? Well, it's just my usual luck. Why is it that the only people who seem to be catching boats as soon as you meet 'em are the——?”

He could not find words for that description. He grinned again.

“Well, I saw you sitting under that tree,” he blurted awkwardly. “You looked good . . . fine . . . a thoroughbred. You don't meet thoroughbreds every day, and—well, look here! See me if it's only for an hour. It would help. You wouldn't know how it would help.”

She hesitated for a moment; and then, hating to be churlish, she nodded.

“Very well,” she said, “if you still feel the same way about it in two or three days' time, let's meet . . . next Friday, say, when I've finished my packing. I'll come to this lounge for tea.”

But she would not let him escort her home. The



undistinguished tenement-house might lessen his joyous faith in that linguistic acquisition, *two hoots*.

## V

Arrayed faultlessly in a new palm-beach suit, Daniel Hinty kept that appointment. They took tea; then, at his suggestion, they went out to the Country Club, of which, apparently, he was a member.

"Yes," he was remarking for the second time over cocktails, "things have seemed a lot different since I met you. I've been getting more of a laugh out of life.

"And look here!" he added gustily. "Meeting you has given me an idea. Tomorrow I'm putting an advertisement in the papers. I'm trying to find someone to come back to that cabaret with me—someone like yourself; a real hundred-per-cent-er; a real two-hooter!"

She laughed to mask her surprise.

"You're very flattering," she said. "But what do you intend doing with this paragon of perfection?"

"Well," he began, and frowned undecidedly for a moment. "I suppose I'll have to call her a 'lady-secretary.' But she'll be something more than that, I guess . . . someone who'll put me right when I'm using the wrong knife and fork; someone who'll tidy up my grammar and teach me how to talk. Yes, but someone who'll show me how to keep my chin up, all the same."

He paused, blushing a little.

“But don’t take it the wrong way,” he pleaded. “Nothing phoney about it. A lady like yourself, I mean; a sort of sister to me; nothing more. And she won’t want for nothing. She can ask whatever she fancies . . . dresses . . . a car . . . a thousand ‘bucks’ a month if she wants it. The place’ll be hers to run it how she likes. And me? Well, I’ll just be learning how to live in it properly.”

But he checked himself.

“No, I’m just dreaming again—like the fool I am. I wouldn’t get her. The sort I’d get wouldn’t be a lady at all; no, of course she wouldn’t. She’d be cold . . . hard . . . an imitation. And while she took my money, she’d laugh at me, too . . . Danny Hinty, the poor fool of a washerwoman’s son!”

And then he looked at her—long, desperately, beseechingly.

“God, I’m insulting you, but if only it was you!” he cried.

She was silent. But she need not be too much dismayed by that speech, she reminded herself. What did it matter? In two short days she was leaving Shanghai; already the consul’s papers were in her hand-bag. She would never see Hinty again.

“Well, you might at least wish for someone a little more weather-proof,” she retorted gaily. “This heat is making a wet rag of me.”

They returned eventually to the Settlement, dining at one of the hotels. They were not dressed for din-

ner, but, at her own suggestion, they got up and danced occasionally, he apologizing for his lack of proficiency. . . . "Still," he murmured, "I've never watched a good dancer without wondering whether he puts scent behind his ears. Christ scourged the money-changers from the Temple, they say. I wonder what He'd do with some of the nits that use my cabaret!"

Then, with the heat defeating him, they sat down; he ordered champagne.

*"But I won't find her!"* he persisted.

She glanced a little nervously about her. Probably he was now slightly drunk. Yet she could not ignore the misery in his voice, the senseless adoration.

"Does it matter so very much if you don't find her?" she retorted. At which came his instant answer.

"Matter! Of course it matters! You've shown me what I'm really looking for. My God, I'd go on my hands and knees for it. I'd——"

"Please!" she silenced him. "Please, you mustn't," she begged. "It wasn't intended that anyone should think of himself like that. It makes life false, horrible, cruel. And, listen to me. Any woman would help you; any decent woman . . . and *not* want money . . . *not* laugh at you."

"Any woman?"

"Yes, any woman."

At which unconsciously he leaned across the table to her, recking not the amused, speculative glances which people were giving him.

"*Any* woman?" he echoed, and a beggar might have smiled thus at seeing his palm filled with gold.

She forced herself to return that smile.

"Why not?" she retorted. "But, careful!" she whispered. "People are staring at us. Perhaps we ought to go."

Which set him instantly apologizing.

"My God, what a street-arab I am! Can't behave myself even when I'm with someone like you. Still . . . *any* woman!"

He could not find words with which to complete that speech. Merely did he gaze at her in a great, ridiculous-seeming gratitude.

He replenished his glass. Less haunted by his thoughts now, he talked on: jesting to her of his early upbringing, his life in the Islington slums. He had worked as an errand-boy, he said; on the racecourses; he had tried and failed in the third-rate boxing-halls. "But I got out of it," he cried, and there was the fierce song of triumph in his voice. He told her too of the women he had met; those that had solaced him a while, those that had plunged him into despair. "Sure, I haven't always been a saint," he confessed. "But when you've never drunk anything except beer you don't much worry about champagne." He talked on, his untrained speech gaining dignity beneath the daring of his thoughts. "*One day!*" he said, and it was the voice of one who promised himself the stars. He stared at her again.

"*Any* woman!" he echoed. "Miss Davidson, why don't you stay?"

Her smile died. He had made her conscious of her surroundings once more.



"Stay? I don't know," she whispered. "It might not be too good for you, and—well, perhaps I'm not exactly what you think I am."

But suddenly she had banished the effect of that speech.

"What on earth are we talking about?" she demanded, and laughed lightly. "I think we're both drunk. . . . Anyhow, I have to leave China. Two days!"

"Two days!"

He tried to grin. "Sure, of course!"

But he bit his lip. "God! It's tough!" he breathed.

And yet he could voice a strange, unexpected triumph. . . .

"Still, you'd have done it, Miss Davidson. You'd have done it if you could have stayed, I mean. I know you would. I could see it in your eyes. . . ."

Yes, he was drunk. But why need it weigh with her so much? Or anything? She forced herself to a smile.

"I don't know," she answered. "Perhaps! . . . But I've got to get back to England. People are expecting me—my father, my sister—well, you understand?"

"Why not?" . . . Contritely, he was seeking to echo that sanity. . . . "Sure! And I'll bet there's some fine man waiting for you over there."

She hated that lie which answered him—he who had tortured himself with such honesty. But it might be kinder.

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“Er—yes! Yes, of course there is!”

Which prompted his sage nodding.

“Yes, I’ll say there is! What’s his name?”

Her pause; the desperate, voiceless striving; but, at last she had uttered it:

“Macalister! Yes, Leith Macalister.”

“Macalister, eh? Well that’s a fine name—just the sort of name you’d expect him to have. Sure, and I can see him. . . . A thoroughbred, a hundred-per-cent-er! A real two-hooter like yourself.”

And then, to wring her the more, he must raise his glass and echo that utterance.

“Yes, I’ll say he is! Good luck to him, Miss Davidson. Good luck to both of you.

“And you don’t know what you’ve done,” he continued thickly. “One of these days when I go to the club and see all about your wedding in one of them illustrated papers, I’ll be as proud as a king. ‘There’s the little girl, the lady, who nearly came and showed me ’ow to do things,’ I’ll say. ‘There’s the fine lady who——’ ”

But suddenly her anguished cry broke in on that speech.

“Stop! Stop, for God’s sake! You don’t know what you’re saying.”

He obeyed her at last; grinning still, yet wondering at her pain. Then he nodded.

“No, I don’t! Sorry!” he murmured. “Behaving like a pig . . . guess I’m drunk. Yes, I’ve been drinking all day . . . beginning to take effect on me. Sorry,

Miss Davidson, but—well, you understand. That's how I was thinking about you. I saw it in your eyes . . . a little sister to me . . . but you're going away! Getting late! Come on, I'll take you home."

They left the hotel, the curious stares of its patrons following them; they reached the street; a car drew up to the side-walk; he opened its door.

"Yes, drunk . . . sorry! Take you home! Washerwoman's son . . . behaving like a pig."

And then, fighting back her tears, she smiled at him, she touched his hand.

"Does it really matter so very much to you?" she asked. "Well, all right! All right! Please don't try to tell me any more . . . I'm not going. Well, not yet! . . . Yes, to Tsingtao, I said . . . Tsingtao with you . . . no, he won't object. Just a little while. . . ."

## VI

*Hinty's Cabaret*, or *The Grand Alcazar Restaurant and Ballroom* as it was somewhat vainly seeking to be called, was the latest and most ambitious addition to Tsingtao's rapidly increasing night-life. Its ground floor was devoted to the restaurant, enhancing the German-style building's air of solid respectability—a suggestion which was not belied; for the restaurant remained open all day; it closed soberly at midnight; a man might take his wife or daughter into it without fear of offence to them. But more of interest to Hinty

and the growing number of his patrons were the building's other floors whose activities might be said to begin when conveniently those of the restaurant had ceased.

On the first floor was the ballroom which provided the cabaret's main attraction, a spacious, modernly ventilated place capable of accommodating forty couples. And precisely forty tables occupied the two sides of its length, a paid dance-hostess sitting at each. Usually a dance-hostess was Russian, though with no greater knowledge of her country than the vague remembrance of a childhood spent in Siberia; and, despite her elegant gowns, her speech was more often than not the speech of a peasant—noisy, friendly, demonstrative. But that imperfection hardly mattered; for to the cabaret's Teuton patrons one Russian woman differed only from another in the matter of her looks or the bestowal of her favours. So little did it matter indeed that to hint that one was the orphaned daughter of a murdered aristocrat might be both legitimate and lucrative.

A man could dance with one of these girls by sharing her table and buying a bottle of champagne. The champagne was not necessarily expensive; to dance with her for half an hour one need only buy her an imitation of it, costing nine dollars and made from banana-juice. Of those nine dollars she earned two as commission. Nevertheless, to offer her the genuine beverage was an act of kindness. It would delay a little the chronic gastritis of early middle-age which



was attributed to this cheaply manufactured substitute. Moreover, a third bottle of the real thing might give one the privilege of waiting for her when she went home to her lodgings at dawn. But if a man sought cheaper entertainment or was a little afraid of his respectability, he might bring his own dance-partner, for whose benefit there was the adjacent ante-room, more softly lit and more tenderly furnished with an occasional settee. While, for the man who could dispense with a woman's company altogether, there was always the bar, or, on the floor above, the bridge room, the poker room; if he were drunk enough, a shower-bath to pull him round.

So that *Hinty's* (and no one seemed disposed to use its grander and more unwieldy name) became popular and flourished. The many and local bachelors came there; the husbands whose wives were conveniently away; the noisy shore-going parties from the foreign battleships; in season, the eager, inquisitive round-the-world tourists from the luxury liners. And if occasionally there was a bout of fisticuffs in the bar, or a mirror was smashed in the poker-room, Hinty did not object too strongly.

"Sure! Sure! What's a bit of high spirits between friends?" he would remark soothingly, and send the politely inquiring Chinese police away with a little reward for the stillness of their tongues.

"Yes, the finest show in the Far East," he boasted. "And, whatever a man wants, he can find it—even a glass of cold water."

But more privately he would sometimes shake his head and ponder a deep and human problem.

“Cold water! Strange that no one in this life ever seems to want anything that’s free!”

## VII

Up a short staircase, and beyond a locked door, was the spacious two-floored apartment which was Daniel Hinty’s own quarters. Jennie shared this with him, but, if at first she feared for her privacy, his bestowal of that *ménage* between them had quickly reassured her. There was her own sitting-room, containing a miniature piano, a wireless cabinet with its dial set for the English broadcast from Hong Kong, a suspiciously new collection of books. Suspiciously new also was the key in its door. Moreover, one had to pass through this sanctum to get to her bedroom beyond it. And such a bedroom! “I feel like a midget in it,” she wrote to Dora Lenskaya.

His servants came to her each morning, much like over-eager school-children endeavoring to present all their talents and virtues at once. They brought her tea, grape-fruit, cigarettes, the latest newspaper from Shanghai. They prepared her bath, ushered her going to it, laid out her clothes—the clothes which despite her protests he had bought for her. So many servants did he seem to have that she itched to turn them out of the house, to say it to him: “This is vulgarity; the very vulgarity which you would discard.”

Yet, in that self-same vulgarity might lie his ache to honour her, his dumb adoration. One might no more interfere with it than pluck out his heart.

The days went by—strange days, unreal, dream-like, because they seemed so absolutely unrelated to anything that she had ever been, or thought, or craved. Yet, while she could be convinced that she was no longer herself, the self that had been or thought or craved otherwise, she was content. There was no hurt, no shock, no surprise, no regret. “Why am I here?” she might begin. “What is my purpose?” But the question died immediately with the springing of that other thought. . . . “England! What does it mean to me now? One place is no different from another if the heart is dead.”. . . And if her mood were less bitter, more hopeful, she might still employ that same indifference. . . . “Yes, *happiness* one day, if I don’t look for it too desperately. But what matters where I find it? Here! Anywhere!”

Yes, it was like “marking time”, as a soldier would on a parade-ground; like waiting for a train and giving vast yet futile thought to a poster on a wall or the shape of someone’s hat; tense, detailed, crowded, spectacular with the mind’s acrobatics, yet meaningless and forgotten as soon as life and purpose moved on again.

But at tiffin or dinner when he came in from his menfolk, or from seeing to the affairs of the cabaret or restaurant, the apartment and its luxury and its ridiculously sycophant menials would recede a little from her, giving her fresher breath. The sense of



“marking time” would recede too. He would be there, fresh-cheeked, alert, opposite her at the table; save for the “boy” who served them, alone with her. Dispelling the cloying, scented futility about her would be his needs . . . stark, real, animal; the urgent, hungry needs of the washerwoman’s son who would rid himself of the gutter. When he could look at her, demand of her, her presence there might not be so illogical.

“Yes,” he had uttered for the second time, “I must be careful not to forget it today. . . . Not a serviette; a *napkin*, Jennie, a napkin. Great! I’m getting along like an ’ouse on fire—a house!”

At which she smiled again, and knew *purpose*, living once more in that pity which had drawn her to him.

“Like a whole block of houses,” she answered, and laughed and set him glowing contentedly with her well-rehearsed chatter. . . . How had his morning been spent? she wanted to know. Had he been to the club; had he beaten anyone at snooker? And even if sometimes she must reprove him for some unthinking trespass on her inward privacy, his contentment would remain unshaken. He would grin, draw back to gain a better look at her, grin once more.

“Say it again, Jennie,” he would answer her. “Come on, say it! . . . Angry with you? Good God, no! It’s just your opinion of me that I’m trying to worm out of you all the time. But, say it again. I like to hear your voice. There’s music in it. God! If ever I have a daughter, that’s just how *she’ll* speak when she’s sore!”



There came a day when he almost made her weep.

"Look!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "Just bought a dictionary. I'm going to start with the A's and learn each word by 'eart . . . heart! . . . well, all except *adieu!*"

## VIII

She had recently sought to justify her position there by demanding that he gave her more work to do. Though he murmured of the existence of his *shroff*, she insisted on being allowed to help in the keeping of the cabaret's accounts. The *shroff*, a Chinese youth who had entered Hinty's employment under a heavy fidelity bond, was pardonably out of sympathy with this arrangement at first; though eventually she won him over. She presented him with that unfailing sop to outraged Oriental susceptibility, a gold wrist-watch which, in the presence of his Chinese inferiors, he consulted with irritating frequency. He, in return, began to teach her Mandarin Chinese.

And when she had established herself with the *shroff*, she attacked Hinty's business expenditure. His *com-pradore*, the native general-storekeeper who supplied the cabaret and restaurant with drinks and food, was cheating him, she discovered; he was being cheated also by the cook who went each morning to the Japanese market. The cook, in defence of his malpractices, would have quoted with righteous indignation that time-honoured Chinese custom whereby one taxed one's

purchases on behalf of another with a percentage of profit for one's self. "Squeeze!" one described it, and deemed it legitimate. And though he might have to employ slightly more involved processes for proving that two fives made a dozen, the *compradore* would have been similarly outraged. She, in her Occidental simplicity, knew nothing of this, however. Proudly she confronted Hinty with an account of the money she was saving him; at which, having appropriately thanked her, he went secretly and consoled the cook with an increase of salary, and presented the *compradore* with a new silk jacket, also an illuminated scroll testifying not only to that gentleman's integrity and honour but to the integrity and honour of his ancestors.

Often she interested herself in the work of the cabaret. If, as occasionally happened, the dance-room were not too well frequented she would sit with one or other of its girls in the attempt to relieve their boredom. They liked her, though they had been shy and suspicious of her at first. Mischievously they gave her the latest gossip concerning Tsingtao's errant menfolk, laughing if they could make her blush. Often too she ventured into the bar or the card-rooms. Which originally had evoked Hinty's surprised gratitude. . . . "Fine, fine! You're drawing 'em like free champagne. And you remember old Carson, the man who made you drink with him last night? Well, he's asked me to play golf. Old Carson! Biggest man in Tsingtao." . . . But, later, observing her increasing popularity, he diluted his enthusiasm. . . . "No, don't

come in tonight!" he might say. "The navy boys will be in. They may be a bit too cheery!" . . . or . . . "Yes, I'm going with old Carson to the races tomorrow—his own party—and he wants you to come as well. But don't let him get too fresh. Next time he forgets to finish shaking hands with you, tread on one of his corns."

But, despite those self-sought tasks, there was little for her to do, so that during the long summer day when the cabaret was closed she must either accept Hinty's company or amuse herself as best she could. Sometimes she would invite some of the cabaret's girls to go with her to the Star cinema, extracting keen delight from paraphrasing the more difficult English dialogue for them; or, hiring rickshaws, they would ride out past the derelict German forts to one of the less frequented beaches. In that warm, placid sea, one might spend a whole afternoon without the slightest hint of chill; and it was the Russian girls who, following the practice of their native country, had taught her the exhilaration of swimming without a costume.

If Hinty claimed her spare time, she did not refuse him. She might still be puzzled at herself; she might still ask was she dreaming; she might still challenge the purpose of it all; but he was decent, generous, tender, she reminded herself and, however ridiculous that relationship might be, she must teach herself to honour it. She must teach herself to respond to his invitations more readily; to enthuse where per-



haps no enthusiasm might be found; to laugh, even if it was more appropriate to wince—or weep!

Yet, with all his ludicrous strivings for that gentility which must never elude him, her presence was not without effect upon him. There was a growing dignity about the man, even though it might only be the dignity of increased susceptibility, or increased capability for suffering. Even when inevitably he came to confessing his love for her, there was dignity about him. One could not feel resentment; only an immense pity; a grain of admiration, too. . . . “Sure, I guess I’m jealous of old Carson, jealous of any man who comes near you. But don’t be worried, Jennie. I’ll never let it frighten you away.”

When they went out together, it seemed that deliberately he left the affairs of the cabaret behind him. He rarely referred to it. He was still vulgarly proud of its success; yet, as soon as he was away from it, another and rarer mood in him could seem to despise it.

If he had only an hour or two to spend with her, he would usually take her out to the Strand Beach to swim. But he did not join her in the water. She had heard from one of the cabaret girls that during the War he was wounded in the thigh. Perhaps this was the explanation. Looking somewhat out of place in his correct suit of white linen, he squatted in the sand, content to guard her hand-bag and towel until she returned to him. Gravely then he would watch her while she took off her bathing-cap and combed her hair. Yet, strangely, though his gaze seemed to be



familiar with every line of her lithe young body, it could never offend. One sensed only its adoration; its reverence almost. "But I must make him *laugh* more," she would warn herself then.

Lately, however, their excursions together had been longer. Putting a luncheon-basket in the car, he often took her out for the whole day. Leaving the neat, ordered town behind, he would seek the hills, negotiating the sharp hairpin bends of the road until twenty miles distant they reached the mountains. Sometimes, on the way, he would halt unexpectedly, and then she might encounter the poet in the man. She would find herself beholding some new and striking aspect of the distant, jagged coast-line far below. Or they were at some bridge whose stream beneath went tumbling to a pool; the trees mirrored there, the ducks swimming.

But always, in an absurd excess of modesty, would he wait until she herself had exclaimed on that beauty. Then, and only then, it seemed, did he permit himself to grin and see merit in his own judgment too.

One day, however, his restraint about themselves was unexpectedly broken; not embarrassingly so, but strangely, obliquely. He made no actual reference to their relationship; only, in a queer, abstract way did he hint at it. But it could haunt the memory—and wring it perhaps—and long after any blunt, direct appeal to her would have been forgotten.

They had motored to the wild, mountain grandeur of Laushan, where now they were taking their picnic lunch in the vicinity of a temple. She broke his silence.

“That temple seems to fascinate you,” she exclaimed.

“Sure, it’s good to look at,” he answered. “I’ve been trying to see the minds of the chaps who built it. They certainly seemed to know what they were aiming at. Yet, if you take a real look at it, all you can see is a few walls, a bit of colour, some steps, and a roof.”

“Simplicity . . . which is the true art,” she reminded him, yet trying not to sound too much like a school-mistress.

He laughed.

“Well, there’s no use trying to talk to me about art,” he retorted. “But, if Danny Hinty had been told to build it, he’d have wanted just about a hundred times that amount of material, and ended up by making it look like one of those cardboard palaces in an amusement-park.

“But, *simplicity!*” he echoed, and fell musingly silent again.

He looked up at last and smiled.

“Perhaps one day I’ll sell that cabaret, and start afresh,” he exclaimed.

The seeming irrelevance of that remark puzzled her; but she made no comment on it.

“What would you do?” she asked, at which he frowned.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “But it might be some sort of life where money came a little less easily . . . where it didn’t get into your blood so much. And that’s the low-down on it, I guess. When it’s too easy,

money's a drug—a dirty drug, like a run of luck at cards. And when you're buried in the card-room, you forget the fresh air outside, the things you planned to do; you can't even see day break. And you can't see *people* any more; you can't even see yourself. . . . Supposing I chucked it all away?"

She was still puzzled, but . . . "What then?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, *simplicity*, you said," he retorted. "Simplicity that gets you somewhere! I've seen a man earning a few pounds a week, and being proud of himself. I've seen him living every penny of it; laughing at me because I was sorry for him. . . . And *me*? Well, I guess I'm beginning to realize why no one's ever likely to call me a gentleman. Like a fool, I've been trying to *buy* gentility. My God, I'm bigger trash now than when I used to sell race-cards with a muffler round my neck."

"Don't!" she pleaded, but he laughed.

"I'm not going to!" he answered her. "I'm not even going to be sorry for myself. I'm glad! Jennie, I think I've found the secret of things . . . yes, like those comic old johnnies who built that temple."

He took her hand. "Jennie, look at me!" he demanded; and then that perplexing jumble of speech and idea betrayed sudden relevance to her, so that she must tremble and pale at the import of it all. . . .

"Jennie, I'll sell out . . . start afresh . . . look for things in the proper way . . . the way you'd have me. Jennie, look at me."

“I’m looking,” she said and smiled at him. “Fine!” she ached to say, but could she surrender herself so utterly to that crazy idolatry within him? It must be fought surely—thrown down and shattered like one of the temple’s senseless gods of paint and wood—not only for her sake . . . his!

“Yes, I must leave him!” came now her desperate thought. “Quickly, before I break him.”

And yet there might be other ways, more subtle, more kind to him. She heard newly her noisy laugh; the jaunty hypocrisy following it.

“Well, I can’t say I’m enamoured of your cabaret, Master Hinty. But, while men are the foolish little schoolboys they are, they’ll always waste their time and money somewhere and somehow, I imagine.

“But, look here!” she added, and now came those words by which she might bring him at last to his senses about her. “For heaven’s sake don’t imagine that my opinions matter so much. I’m not the fine, high-souled creature you think I am. I’m not even a lady. Before I came here I was just a little backstreet nobody, working for my living . . . tapping a typewriter; answering a telephone . . . going home each night to mend my stockings . . . listen to a father who’d sell his soul for a half bottle of whisky.

“And you’d better know some more,” she continued with a wry little grin at him. “When you met me I was going home at the public expense—yes, the consul was repatriating me—and I was living in a tenement-house, out where they forget to empty the garbage-cans. And a little Russian seamstress used to over-



pay me for sewing dresses for her . . . money she needed herself, probably . . . and wasn't I glad to be taking it? Oh, and I could tell you plenty—enough to make your hair stand on end.

"Anyhow," she concluded, "where's your precious, aristocratic Jennie Davidson *now*?"

He laughed.

"Sure, Jennie, when you and I get excited we certainly know how to talk," he commented. "But, *an aristocrat*! You'd be an aristocrat, walking round in a potato-sack . . . Still, this seamstress girl! She sounds good to me. Tell me more about her. God, and it must be hot in Shanghai now! Why don't you ask her up for a holiday? And send her some bucks from the petty cash for her fare. . . . No, don't send it; you might hurt her feelings. Damned proud, some of these Russian women. We'll think up something smarter. But get her here—get her here!"

Yes, she had failed to defeat him—absolutely. But she could not be miserable because of it. For the first time in many days she used his Christian name.

"I'll write to her," she said, and smiled straight into his eyes. "Yes . . . thanks, Dannie! You're a thoroughbred!"

## IX

Dora Lenskaya accepted that invitation. Moreover, because Jennie had carefully hidden any suggestion of Hinty's charity from it, she accepted it immediately,

boldly. . . . “Please to find a room for me in not a too dear house where I pay my own bill,” she wrote to Jennie. When, however, she found herself installed in Hinty’s own apartment, she did not object too strongly. Having now met Jennie’s employer and given her tentative approval of him, she was prepared graciously to accept some little of his bounty.

As the days passed and she began to detect Jennie’s unhappiness about him, she was puzzled. Particularly did she fail to understand why Jennie could sometimes plan to leave him.

“Why do you want to run away like foolish girl and starve?” she protested. “True, he is good man and give you good money. But what you give him? *Tshort!* You are like mother, father, sister, language teacher—all in one. You could give no more if you were princess.”

“Perhaps, perhaps,” Jennie agreed, yet as quickly did she retract that utterance.

“No, Dora! He sees something more in me than that. He sees dignity, truth—loveliness, perhaps. I’m an ideal he’s set up for himself; something to worship like—like a religion. I’m perfect, faultless, just like our dear, virginal grandmothers were supposed to be; something that couldn’t possibly go wrong. And it’s growing on him, more and more each day.

“Gosh, can’t you see, Dora?” came then her fierce anguish. “I’ve got to tell him—not half a story; the whole story. . . . Leith! My baby! Everything!”

Dora, her starveling imagination reacting in pardon-

able unscrupulousness to the luxury of Jennie's bed room, shrugged her shoulders scornfully.

"Why?" she asked. "What story shall Mister Hinty tell you of himself? Do you think he sit all the time in sky with angels?"

"But he loves me, Dora. I've got to tell him. And then? . . . Well, what happens to him?"

"So!" . . . Dora stared at her for a moment . . . "So, you love him, too! *Tak!* Then, perhaps you marry him."

Jennie shook her head, yet she could not smile at that speech.

"I don't love him," she answered. "Definitely, I don't. But perhaps there are things even more important than loving a man—things more worthy, more useful to him perhaps. Love needn't always be sacrifice or service. It needn't always be noble. It can be cruel, greedy, destroying. . . . But when you only pity a man, your mind is clearer. You're not trying to burn yourself up because he's forgotten to kiss you, for instance. You feel the finer things, the more sensible things. You feel like a mother about him; you feel the milk in your breasts. Yes, one keeps a lover waiting sometimes, to stop and help a homeless dog."

From those mysterious, alien fastnesses of her Slavonic soul, Dora Lenskaya considered that speech. She looked back; back through the strange, chaotic years that had been her own.

"*Moi, moi!*" she grieved, almost in soliloquy. "How Woman must always talk of this life! Never can she

live it like bird. Never can she forget to think of it.”

But the ornate challenge of that room restored her. She frowned at her hands, reminded of their need of a manicure.

“Poof! He is rich,” she retorted. “And perhaps soon he is different. A man grow tired to look at woman all the time like priest. Soon he remember how many dresses he give you.”

Jennie smiled; musingly she smiled. She shook her head again.

“No, I don’t think so,” she answered; and, thinking of him thus, her voice could take on a strange ring of pride. She could almost forget that gnawing self-reproach and be happy.

But one day the Russian girl’s practicality disturbed her strangely.

“Sure! Sure! He looks at you like goddess now,” Dora was exclaiming. “But wait! Perhaps very soon Nadya Skolnikova come back to Tsingtao.”

“Nadya Skolnikova?” Jennie echoed questioningly, yet the name seemed vaguely familiar.

Dora nodded.

“Yes. Perhaps you don’t hear from girls here. But Nadya, just before you come, is sick—appendicitis. She go to hospital in Shanghai because her sister can come to see her, and better doctor is there.”

And then Jennie remembered.

“Yes, I’ve heard of her. He used to call and see her at the hospital. He told me of her, in fact. . . . Almost as soon as we met,” she added loyally.



"But how did you know of this?" she demanded suddenly. At which, observing Jennie's obvious interest in the subject, Dora was well content.

"Many girls tell me," she answered slowly. "Mister Hinty's girls, here in cabaret. Yes, when Russian women meet we talk much . . . Nadya was here a long time, they say. She do not work, she play, she make fool of him. He give her all she ask. She is number-one girl here. She can pull his nose if she like. . . . And now she leave hospital; she finish holiday—how do you say—convalescence. If she don't find rich fool in Shanghai, she come back here to pull his nose once more."

Dora paused. Perhaps she was over-elaborating that topic, she reproached herself honestly.

"*Tak!* I talk too much," she exclaimed. "Yes, he is good man. He make a present of his shirt, as English people do say. . . . But do not run away because you think you break his heart. You stay. You put your money in bank. Man is like cat. Have many hearts."

## X

It was Hinty himself who next discussed Nadya Skolnikova with her; just over a week later when, still acknowledging a grudging admiration for him, Dora the seamstress had returned to Shanghai.

"Jennie," he began, "there's a new girl coming to the cabaret next week; to be more exact, a girl who

was here before. Put her on the pay-roll . . . Nadya Skolnikova.”

She would not betray her recognition of that name. She nodded casually.

“A dance-partner, of course?”

“Yes.”

But he frowned.

“I ought to tell you,” he continued. “She’s the girl who—well, in a way, Jennie, she brought us together. I was taking some flowers to her the day I saw you at that hospital. I didn’t think she was coming back to cabaret work. In fact, I was rather hoping she wouldn’t. I imagined that, being in Shanghai, she might look for something better. Still, there it is! I promised to keep her job open for her. She’s written to say she’s coming. I guess I can’t go back on her.”

She smiled.

“Good heavens, no!” she commented. “And now that you mention it, I remember the name. . . . I overheard the girls talking about her. She’s pretty they say, and apparently she was popular here.”

Slowly a flush came to his cheeks.

“I see,” he murmured, and stared at her for a moment. “You’ve heard quite a lot, it seems; too much, perhaps. Well, I guess I ought to tell you a little more.

“But, see here!” he added suddenly and challengingly. “If you don’t get me straight about this girl, she isn’t coming here.”

"Dannie," she answered composedly, and that moment could offer exhilaratingly the first emotion of freedom that she had known in long weeks, "you don't have to explain or apologize for anything you do either in your business or outside it. The cabaret is yours, your private life is yours. As for me—well, I imagine I'm like this girl who's coming here; merely someone on your pay-roll; someone who's as free to walk out of here as she'll be."

He winced, and then she knew his anger.

"Damn these gossiping women! I might have known it. Anyhow, that settles it, Jennie. I was a fool to think of it. She's not coming. I'll send her a wire—and now!"

He left her, striding quickly from the room without looking back at her. It was the first time he had ever dared to show resentment against her. It could surprise her, sober her. "Perhaps I'm thinking and talking like a catty fool," she reasoned. Presently she went in search of him, finding him on a floor below the apartment in the tiny room which he used as his office. He was clumsily putting a sheet of note-paper into an ancient typewriter.

"Have you sent that wire?" she asked, at which he frowned at her again.

"No, I haven't," he answered brusquely. "But I'm going to. Still, I ought to send her some sort of letter as well. I'm doing it now."

"And I guess you're right," he added. "You and

Nadya wouldn't mix. I'm a fool.". . . But his resentment remained.

She put a hand on his shoulder.

“Why?” she retorted gently. “But don't send that letter. Don't wire her. Dannie, look at me. Let me see you smile. If I've sounded like an ungrateful little prig, forgive me. . . . But there's something on your mind about that girl. And we're pals, I think. Why not tell me?”

He looked up suddenly.

“Pals!” he echoed, and his smile could echo it again. “Yes, I'd been hoping it was that way between us, Jennie. . . . And that was why this girl didn't matter, I'd thought.

“Yes, nothing matters any more, Jennie, if we're pals and you believe in me,” he continued; and his gaze was calm, proud. It left her marvelling at him a little.

“Still,” he added, a shade less assuredly, “I'd better tell you. She was my ‘number-one’ girl here. Sure, she's got her faults, plenty of 'em, but I'm not ungrateful. She helped me to work up this business. She could talk, she could handle the men . . . keep them interested in the show, yet put 'em under her thumb if they tried to make too rough a house of it. Yes, and unlike the other girls, she's local born . . . born in Shanghai . . . smart, well-educated. French, English, Russian! They're all the same to her. Yes, if she wanted to—if she were only a little less lazy—she could be a rich woman, I guess.”



Well, he had not criticized Nadya so strongly as Dora Lenskaya had done. She could like him for it. But she could not resist that slightly provocative comment.

"Nadya Skolnikova is my predecessor, in short."

He frowned, he flushed again, but he would not quarrel with that utterance.

"In a way, yes!"

"And there was something more to you than that! She belonged to you!"

He hesitated only for a second.

"Yes, she belonged to me," he said.

Then restrainedly he was pleading with her.

"That was yesterday, Jennie! And I think I've said it before. If you've never drunk champagne, you're content with beer. I couldn't see that far in front of me. . . And though it's probably beside the point, don't get too grand an idea about the way she belonged to me. The first woman to make a home in this flat is yourself. If you don't believe it, I'm sorry."

"I do believe it," she assured him, yet he had surprised her again.

But now that unspoken question was being answered for her; by Hinty himself.

"You'll probably call me a darned hypocrite, Jennie, but a man may still have dreams, even though you wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole. . . . Yes, in my comic sort of way I was still trying to keep a bargain with myself. I'd save this home, such as it is, for a——"

“For a wife!” he almost said, but he checked himself. He smiled at her again triumphantly, challengingly almost.

“Well, I think I’ve proved it, Jennie. The woman I want under my roof is the woman I can respect . . . a wife, a sister. Or if it can’t be that, then, let it be even a little more difficult . . . a pal . . . someone who respects me also.”

She stared at him, marvelling again. She had not previously been conscious of it, but how strangely, how unexpectedly was this man climbing to that stature which he had demanded for himself. Yes, it was almost humiliating to her that she had not seen it before; for now she could recall not one, but a hundred subtle trivialities that had combined to bring about that change in him. There was a different look in his eyes, a firmer ring to his voice. No longer did he seem so miserably haunted by his own inferiority, so pathetically apologetic for it. His exterior seemed different; the way he walked, and bore himself; the movement of his hands. And, though that undistinguished London accent might always brand him as a man of the people, his speech was different; it was losing the meaningless parrot-phrases of the gutter, the hackneyed humour of it; he would utter thoughts as he might express them in a letter. . . . “Yes, he has dignity,” was her thought. “Strength, perhaps. If he were ever angry with me now, I believe I could be afraid of him.”

Yet it was *his* doing, not hers; *his* triumph. Such

change might only spring from the man himself; his own dreams, his own urgings. . . . A whip to his flesh, yet a whip that he grasped in his own hand.

But now he was addressing her, and with that same astonishing calm on him.

"Well, Jennie, what do we do about this girl? Do we have her back or do I write this letter? I'm not forgetting I promised to take her back, but she can't complain if I get her a better job elsewhere."

She was almost too distracted to answer.

"Do what you like!" she exclaimed. "And, Dannie, I ought never to have questioned it. It—well, it depends surely only on how you feel about her; whether she'd make you happy or not."

"Happy?" He gave that word his half incredulous echo. "You're not thinking she's going to mean anything to me again. No, that was finished . . . finished entirely . . . the day I met you. She means nothing to me, nothing absolutely."

He got to his feet; with that strange inward smile upon him, he went to the window, gazing down the long tree-lined avenue to where was the shimmering sea.

"Well, I still leave it to you," he continued. "If you don't want her here, there are plenty of other jobs we can find for her. But somehow I hope you'll let her come."

"Your promise to her, you mean?"

He laughed. His presence seemed to fill the entire room; she felt dwarfed, microscopic.

“No!” he said. “She’d merely help me to test myself . . . be a little more sure of something. I love you!”

“Aye, but don’t let it worry you,” he added swiftly. “Not yet . . . not yet!”

She could not answer him. She could only wonder why she wanted to weep. Presently, when his back was turned for a moment, she took that sheet of paper from the typewriter and crumpled it.

“Where did you buy that new tie?” she asked. “I like it!”

## XI

Nadya Skolnikova was now at *Hinty’s*.

That was her laugh which haunted the cabaret at nights. One could not easily mistake Nadya’s laugh, nor forget it. A rare laugh—dancing, buoyant, provocative; like the light, upward impulse of newly poured champagne, with Nadya herself lifting it to her lips. It emboldened or mocked one, seduced or irritated; according to one’s mood, the lateness of the hour, or how one stood in Nadya’s own affections.

And like her laugh was Nadya herself—quick, spontaneous, effervescent, nervously keyed even to the point of brittleness. Brittleness was in the movement of her hands, the staccato of her heels, even in the quality of her hair—bleached, sapped, metallic.

But they were glad that Nadya was back. *Hinty’s* was prospering, even more heartily than before. Said



the girls among themselves: Sure, sure! *English Jennie* was good . . . lovely . . . her soul like a white chrysanthemum. Yet too much loveliness saddened one, stirred the memory too bitterly, tortured it like the naïve ringing of church bells on a half-forgotten sabbath. Yes, a white chrysanthemum! But life was short. Sure, perhaps this night, Nadya would get drunk again and dance the "cancan." And said the men: Quite! Quite! Any man might boast of a pure five-minutes occasionally; like mourning someone dead or writing to his mother. But it was good to be one's self again. And Hinty was right. When did the English girl pack her bags?

There was little need for Jennie to frequent the cabaret now. In any event, Hinty had never been entirely in favour of it. Moreover, as Jennie had impressed on him, if Nadya returned, it should be to her former position of responsibility as the cabaret's "number-one" girl. Only thus could they hope to spare her feelings. Hinty had gratefully agreed with this; so that Nadya was now to be encountered in his apartment often, and Jennie saw much of her. Yet a different Nadya seemingly; one who, far from being the time-wasting drone whom Dora Lenskaya had described, could offer Hinty some of his own fine enthusiasm. Almost every day she would be seeking his opinion or approval of something; planning fresh entertainment for his patrons; stressing always the importance of things that were new, original, unexpected. . . . Was she indifferent to Jennie's presence? Hinty did not

know. But, listening to Nadya, he would draw back from her, scratch his head, grin. . . . “Look here!” he would protest again. “What exactly did they do to you in that hospital? Never known you so energetic!”

“Yes, she’s a great little sport!” he commented to Jennie. “I didn’t think she’d take it half so well.”

With which Jennie had to agree.

“I like her,” she said. “She’s amusing. Invite her up to dinner.”

But it was strange. Nadya Skolnikova had never yet accepted that invitation.

## XII

There came a day when the two girls had their first quarrel.

It was after dinner one evening, and a telephone call had come to the apartment for Hinty from old Carson. Hinty was not to be found, but “I’ll look for him,” Jennie assured old Carson. Not thinking to trouble the servants, she descended to the cabaret, where, following their usual practice of arriving somewhat earlier than the rest of the staff, Nadya and the leader of the orchestra were already in the ballroom, discussing the coming night’s programme. Hinty was not there, nor had they seen him, but, knowing Hinty’s flattered interest in old Carson, Jennie was anxious that he should be found. Seeing the cabaret’s head-boy standing near, she ordered him to look for his master. “Perhaps he’s in the restaurant,” she suggested.

At that moment Hinty appeared from the restaurant, and, overhearing Jennie's message for him, went with schoolboyish haste to speak to old Carson. But, as Jennie moved to follow him, Nadya Skolnikova softly detained her.

"Just a moment, sister!" she murmured, and for the first time one saw her frown. "That head-boy belongs here—this cabaret! If you want anyone to run messages for you, why not use your own servants? Surely you've plenty enough."

The orchestra leader, sensitively masculine, moved away. He liked Jennie, but he liked Nadya, his countrywoman, also; and a man was better apart from such profitless situations. The two women faced each other, alone in the centre of the empty dance-floor.

"It had never occurred to me like that," Jennie was answering. "Still, I suppose you're right. I'm sorry!"

Yet she lingered. Dusk heightened the pallor of her face. "I think we ought to talk about something," she whispered.

Nadya laughed—that nervous, brittle laugh which could irritate as intensely as it charmed.

"Why?" she retorted; and then, challengingly, she corrected herself.

"Why not? But I'm not a thought-reader. What is it?"

Jennie hesitated.

"I'd been hoping we could be friends, Nadya," she answered. "Perhaps we are, but I somehow fancy that if we're not it's my fault rather than yours."

That speech was subtly flattering to the Russian girl. She pondered it for a moment. But that opportunity of pitting her strength against Jennie was something that she had sought deliberately. It was not to be wasted.

“Your fault? I fail to see it,” she commented artlessly. “In any event, as far as I’m concerned, friendship doesn’t enter into it. It’s just a matter of business. All I ask is this. . . . You keep to your side of *Hinty’s*, and I’ll keep to mine.”

“Do I understand you?”

Jennie was still endeavouring to smile; but . . .

“I guess you do,” the other retorted coldly. “Your half is *Hinty’s* apartment; mine is his cabaret.

“But don’t get me wrong,” she added with a momentarily disarming grin. “I’m merely talking about the *business* side of things, in the same way as you’d be sending me out on my ear if I muscled in on that *ménage* upstairs. Yes, just a matter of internal politics, Miss Davidson. No offence given; no offence expected. If you care to come to the cabaret like any other woman, you’ll be very welcome.

“Sure, and the cabaret needs girls,” she continued. But now her grin had died. Mockingly she asked. “Yes, why not take a table?”

Jennie winced, yet she hesitated once more. Even now she could try to persuade herself that she need not be angry. Bitter as it seemed, there was a certain rough justice in Nadya’s remarks, she recognized.

She laughed.



"Well, if it would help the cabaret, I would!" she answered. "Heaven knows I do little enough in the way of actual work here."

"Fine!" exclaimed Nadya. "I'll fix a table for you tonight. There's a girl sick. I need one badly."

But suddenly and grimly she faced Jennie.

"Sister, that is something you *won't* do," she almost raved. "If you can get away with that purity campaign of yours upstairs, you certainly won't do it down here."

Jennie tried to laugh again, but now the effort had failed her utterly.

"I see!" she exclaimed, and could only just restrain herself from slapping the other girl's face.

"I see!" she uttered again. "Well, now let's have it. We're talking about Hinty. . . . *Hinty*, I said. Talk on!"

"Hinty!" . . . Echoing that name, Nadya's voice was newly tremulous, pathetic almost. . . . "I'm not interested in Hinty," she flung back desperately. "Hinty's just a poor sap, worried about the next aitch he's going to drop. I'll be interested in Hinty when I haven't a tooth in my head."

But now she abandoned that pretence. Her voice was coming in thick, sobbing urgency.

"Yes, perhaps I *am* interested in Hinty! I knew him when he was fine . . . a man . . . when the good red blood was in him . . . before you'd made a sucker out of him. And he's a sucker every time he falls for that 'big white sister' stuff of yours; every time he apologizes for being as God made him; every time

he thinks he's going to sell out and make a gentleman of himself. . . .”

“He told you that?”

“Yes, he told me! He's told me plenty, so that I've been sick with listening to it all . . . so that I've itched to snatch that parson's collar off him . . . to make him drunk again. And when he's sold out, and you've made a little white-faced Lord Squirt of him, what's he going to do? Play a harp, I guess . . . start a racket, winding wool for dames. Yes, that's why I'm interested in Hinty.”

Yet that passionate honesty was exhausting herself. Wiping her tears from her cheeks, Nadya Skolnikova was laughing again—the careless, metallic laugh that would sustain her against all hurt, all memory.

“Huh! I could get him back from you any time I liked,” she uttered calmly. “Any time I cared to show him my knee.

“But I wouldn't have it on my conscience I'd lost you a job,” she continued. Grinning once more, she began to walk away. “Jobs like yours are hard to keep, especially when a girlie's stock-in-trade is only the water-wagon. But there's plenty of time, sister. Mr. Hinty will recover. The ‘temporary insanity’ will pass—the woollen panties era with it! We'll get back to silks . . . soft music——”

“What's this about woollen—er—underclothing?” It was Hinty's voice as his thickset form loomed unexpectedly in the door-way. At which Nadya Skolnikova chimingly answered him.

"Miss Davidson was telling me she wears woollen panties. Perhaps you didn't know. But run along. I'm trying to convert her to silks.

"Oh, but I beg her pardon," she added. "Perhaps, occasionally, she's worn a bit of silk like the rest of us! Yes, I'm sure she has."

Hinty stared at them for a moment, trying vainly to search their faces in the gloom of the unlighted room. Yet, having heard nothing of their earlier conversation, he was eventually able to reassure himself. He laughed.

"Yes, perhaps I *ought* to run along," he agreed with heavy waggishness. "Sounds hardly respectable."

He disappeared, going down to the restaurant again.

Nadya stared after him for a moment; hungrily it seemed. Then she shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, I have a job to do," she declared dully. "And if I've made you weep, I'm sorry. It's the rotten way I'm made. And don't let anything I said about the cabaret keep you away from it. Come down and split a bottle with me sometimes. Yes, come tonight. We'll both get drunk. . . . But, Christ! Don't we all weep!"

Swiftly then she fled.

Jennie went back to her sitting-room, where, hearing her return, the *amah* had switched on the radio for her. It gushed a noisy glare of orchestral music from Hong Kong. She silenced it. She sat down by the open window, fanning herself against the oppressive August heat.

“Every time he apologizes for being as God made him,” Nadya had flung at her.

The spurious logic of it was stabbing at her like knife-thrusts.

“A little white-faced Lord Squirt . . . playing a harp . . . winding wool for dames.”

And yet again. . . . “I could get him back from you any time I liked, any time I cared to show him my knee.”

Nadya! Herself! Which of them might help him? . . . Neither, perhaps!

Her thoughts toiled on, like weary, leaderless marchers in a fog-bound waste. . . . Poor Nadya! Who once had flouted him, laughed at him, boasted openly of her infidelities against him; yet, returning and finding him lost to her, could cling to that torturing scene, like a drowning wretch at a straw. Yes, one understood, at last, so much that had seemed perplexing in Nadya; her false, excessive gaiety, the way she plunged into making the cabaret prosper, the tireless, almost fanatical energy of it all. Poor Nadya, who so lightly would have wrecked him; and yet, imagining that self-same threat against him from an alien hand, must tear herself asunder now in unavailing fear.

A dog and a bone, maybe! But no, it could logically be something more. Here was the *new* Daniel Hinty, the man whom Nadya Skolnikova had never seen, the man who by a ten-millionth chance might grope his way to the stars. Perhaps, beneath that surprise, her



half-barbaric soul had paused and stared. Perhaps Nadya loved him.

But she must think of herself again. . . . China, Tsingtao, the weeks marching on! Where were they leading her? Did they lead her to happiness or was it only the senseless "marking time"? And Hinty had just been in the room for a moment to reassure himself about her, to renew his adoration, yet going from her again—quickly, understandingly, venturing no surprise nor question. . . . "Jennie, you look lovely sitting there—like a statue, a goddess! But no! Don't move, don't speak if you don't want to. I begin to feel that way myself sometimes. One's mood can be a castle—no, a cathedral—no, a *sanctuary*, damn it. One doesn't want anyone breaking into it". . . . Yes, the new man, the new speech, ~~the~~ new thought in him!

Yet, as he was going from her, she had nearly called him back.

"Danny, I want to tell you something," she would have begun. "That talk you overheard between Nadya and myself! That nonsense about woollen undies! . . . But, it wasn't nonsense, Danny. It was parable . . . serious parable . . . the sort of parable that wrecks lives . . . breaks hearts. You've got to listen, Danny!"

And she would have told him then . . . of the things that had brought her there; of the things that had chained her there; of Leith Macalister . . . her baby . . . of that frailty which a man may only forgive in himself.

“So, you see, Dannie! She was right. It hasn’t always been the *woollens*. It was the *silks*, the *soft music*. . . . Where’s your goddess now?”

Yes, and she still must tell him . . . some day . . . but how? One did not destroy a vision in a man unless one offered him the thing that was nobler.

*Nadya Skolnikova!*

Musingly she echoed that name within herself. Then suddenly she uttered it aloud—questioningly, seekingly, her voice like a tremulous prayer.

Yet she rejected that prayer. She laughed, wept a little. Getting up, she switched on the radio again, the distorted wail of a Hong Kong contralto sobering her like a physical assault.

“I guess he’s become a habit,” she said.

### XIII

All manner of men came to *Hinty’s*. They came as freely as they might enter a saloon, and with as little social distinction. The local commercial men came there, entering it quickly from their cars. In its bar or card-rooms they passed a fevered school-boyish hour or so; then, remembering their wives, went reluctantly away. And if they ignored its ballroom, it was not because of any indifference to it; only that an encounter in the street next day with one’s late dance-partner might be mildly embarrassing. So effusive were these Russians; so lacking in that—er—desirable restraint

which—well, a Britisher was a Britisher! There was a time and place for everything!

The cautious Britishers, who had come to oust the pre-war Germans, were only a minority, however. A minority were the tourists from the American luxury liners, though, when they arrived, the city might sustain itself grandly for a whole month afterwards; a minority, also, the leisured-drinking skippers from the merchant ships. For, in the summer season, *Hinty's* could draw its *clientèle* from that whole host of holiday-makers which came wave-like from the heat of Shanghai and Hong Kong, from the stewing middle-reaches of the Yangtse river, from the parched, dusty plains of the North . . . business men, clerks, shopmen; men who were not only temporarily rich of purse, but who, in the main, left caution and identity behind. And swelling their number was that younger, noisier, and hardly lesser host which, donning mufti, swept ashore each evening from the foreign battleships. While, battenning upon them all (and it needed a sharper man than *Hinty* to detect their subtle presence!) was that attendant horde of opportunists—beach-combers, card-sharpers, pimps, racecourse tricksters, confidence-men.

Yet *Hinty's* was not truly *Hinty's* until well past midnight, until this eager, masculine mob had thinned itself a little. Then, reluctantly had the liberty-men returned to the discipline of the battleships, the elderly and less demonstrative commercial men to the Grand or Strand hotels, the poorer to their boarding-houses.

The discerning would say that the character of *Hinty's* had now become more set, less subject to unexpected and possibly irritating change. There would be less risk of a fracas in the bar or someone being ejected, protesting and empty-pursed, from a card-room. The wilder and more youthful element had taken its swift, ecstatic hour, and gone away to its headache. Those that remained were of sterner quality, more substantial both in demeanour and pocket; the men who could drink a whole night through, yet come next night again; solid men, seasoned men. *Old China hands*, they called themselves, a little proudly. The *inveterates*, Hinty had recently taught himself to dub them. Or, if a better description than either of these were needed, one might echo the elegant English of Hinty's educated Chinese *shroff*. . . . “Yes,” he would say, as he consulted his new wristwatch behind the glass window of the cash-desk, “any gentleman who finds himself here at two o'clock in the morning time is liable to stay until breakfast hour.”

At three-thirty in the dance-room the cabaret proper was usually drawing to a close. The new Eurasian soprano from Shanghai had finished her sentimental English ballads. . . . *Just a Song at Twilight* she would sing, or Tosti's *Parted*. The Serbian troupe had finished its acrobatic dancing. Nadya Skolnikova and her partner were taking a last encore for their “exhibition-tango.” There might still be a healthy murmur from the adjacent bar, there might still come a full-throated roar as the Germans drank “Heil Hitler” and



dashed their glasses to the floor; but to the ballroom itself had come an air of quiet, almost of intimate seclusion. Less frequently now did one hear the orchestra. Its lean, pallid Russians sat back in their chairs, smoking and quietly talking among themselves; they retired soon to eat for half an hour; and when they returned it was no longer a foxtrot that they played, but a waltz, slow, languorous, charged with their own native melancholy. While, at a table, the man who in the bar had sworn his intention of going home at midnight, might now be heard in murmurous *tête-à-tête* with his dance-partner. Yet, he would dance no more that night; and quietly, wisely, Nadya Skolnikova would get up and go to the electric light switches, experimentally manipulating them one by one until rose-tinged softness held the room and gave deep slumbrous shadows to the eyes. Then, surveying and approving that scene from the steps of the ante-room, she would whisperingly seek the head-boy:

“Boy! Look-see! Champagne nearly finished; number seven table. . . . Yes, new bottle!”

By which one recognized artistically the coming of that strange and brooding finale—*The Hour of the Womenless Men!*

#### XIV

The Hour of the Womenless Men!

That description need only be euphemistic, polite. A man who leaned across the table and stroked a Russian girl's hand might, a few thousand miles away,

possess a wife; or no more distant, maybe, than the German sanatorium just outside the town in the hills. Yet, to satisfy the conscience, there were bachelors enough—the elderly, faded men who had wept their hours of grief and sent a wife home in a leaden shell; the hard, restless roamers who would fly from ordered living as fiercely as they had fled from their own parochial pumps; the squaw men, the sentimental dreamers who had missed their mark, the men who listed their women as a hunter might his trophies. There would even come the misogynists, who went away strutting, unmoved, like Spartans boasting of their strength.

One might know them by their eyes, their lips, the unbridled speech that came from them. . . . “Sure, sure, she left me flat, I tell you. Left me for a cheap, ham-acting bum from Pasadena. Sister, where do you live? I’ll be waiting for you outside.” It would be the speech of one who had long ago consoled himself. Or a man might sob out his life-story in twenty minutes; or take up dross and worship it as gold. . . . “Gosh! I’ve got to get you out of here. You were never meant for it, my dear. Tomorrow! Tomorrow!” . . . Tense, cynical gems might be squandered on ears that recognized only a half dozen words of English. . . . “God! what’s life that it’s so darned valuable? A drink, a woman, and—well, next you know you’re dead!”

Yet sometimes there might come a man whose presence offered no logical explanation whatever; who neither wanted to buy one for twenty dollars nor deem one priceless; who neither sought to offer a moral nor

extract one; who was not even testing his strength, nor getting material for a book; who, so little did that Hour of the Womenless Men seem to matter to him, might have been sitting in an afternoon tea-shop.

Such a man, apparently, was John Granger Lee.

## XV

John Granger Lee!

No one yet knew him by that name, but they imagined him to be English and one of the town's more recent visitors. Tall, thin, loose-limbed and slightly awkward of gait, his physical appearance would not have attracted much favour until he sat down; and then, with his movements stilled and his body in repose, one might have taken a second glance at him, marking his lean, almost aesthetic features, his sudden air of frail, innate dignity. His age was probably forty, though his thin, blond hairs and his rather excessively blue eyes might have increased the suggestion of his years; and he was ill perhaps—not with any specific thing, but with the weariness of mind and body which sometimes steals unseen to those who have tolerated exile too long. As the patrons of *Hinty's* might picturesquely have said, he had probably missed too many boats!

But, though that much about him had been observed, his identity still challenged description. A business man? Hardly! A clerk or commercial traveller? No! A naval or military man? Even less likely! With his



strange, self-contained remove, he might almost have been a priest, a monk, or the student of some remote and abstruse science. Yet such men came to *Hinty's* never.

Usually he appeared at about eleven-thirty, when, ignoring the bar, he took a seat in the ante-room of the ballroom. There, in fluent Chinese, though it was not a dialect that anyone recognized, he ordered a brandy, with a ginger-ale to give it length. But it was noticed that, thereafter, and however late he remained, he ordered ginger-ale only. Which was hardly good business for *Hinty's*. But when towards the early morning the cabaret was done, and the Hour of the Womenless Men had come, he would descend quietly to the ballroom and claim a dance with one of its girls. But it would be an awkward, amateurish dance; one that seemed to give him no pleasure. He did not dance again. Taking his partner to her table, he ordered champagne—the genuine and expensive variety—but only for her. Again in his faultless Chinese would come ridiculously his order for ginger-ale.

His dance-partners could offer no clue to his identity. When Anna, the vivacious little brunette from Mukden with whom he had sat last, was asked for an account of his conversation, she could render it only with difficulty. . . . “Yes, he stay late, very late. He wait for me; he take me to my house in rickshaw. But all he talk is *dance* . . . *cabaret* . . . how I like my job . . . where is my mother, my father? He leave me at door; he say *good night*, thank you; then he go away. When



I go to bed and I tell my husband I drink number-one champagne and no one ask to sleep with me, my husband laugh and do not believe. "*Tshort!*" he say. 'Perhaps you lose your good looks! Perhaps soon I work instead.' "

"Sure!" exclaimed Nadya Skolnikova, commenting on that story. "He's sick! But sick with what?"

There came a time when they took their perplexity to Hinty. He smiled, he frowned, he smiled again.

"Well, it's no one's business, as long as he's happy here," he said.

Their concern about the mystery man was infectious, however.

"Why not get into talk with him?" he suggested to Nadya Skolnikova. But he retracted that speech.

"No, don't!" he uttered rather tactlessly. "Perhaps I'll get Miss Davidson to give him the once-over."

That opportunity presented itself a few nights later. Jennie and Hinty were returning at about twelve-thirty from their first visit to the house of old Carson. They had dined there, and played bridge. Yet, nowadays, Hinty's pleasure in being "adopted" by old Carson could seem a little less childish, more restrained.

"Carson was rather flattering about my bridge to-night," he murmured as they got from the car. "Still, he needn't overdo it quite so much. I guess, if it weren't for the chance of seeing you, he wouldn't be interested in me at all."

That remark was probably true. But old Carson's hospitality had been generous that night, and she was

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in a good mood. She need not be unduly distressed.

“You’re a jealous old kill-joy,” she teased him. At which, pinching her arm, he laughed.

“Jealous! Not a bit! I know you too well for that,” he retorted. “But I know my limitations also. There’s no sense in Carson’s pretending to treat me like the King of England when I’m only Dannie Hinty.”

She mused that speech as they entered the building and climbed the stairs. “Perhaps he’s no longer Dannie Hinty!” came her warm thought for him, but one might never dare to express it.

But now, having reached the first floor, they were halting, peering into the various rooms of the crowded cabaret.

“Twelve-thirty, and almost a full house!” he exclaimed approvingly.

And then for a second time he stared into the ante-room.

“Don’t look for a moment, but there’s that chap I told you about,” he whispered. “There, sitting in the corner by himself.”

Discreetly she followed his gaze.

“He looks ill,” she commented at last. “And, really! Someone ought to get him to take an interest in his clothes.”

He nodded.

“Sure! The man’s thoughts seem to burn him up. Gosh! it seems hardly decent to let him sit there like it, night after night. It’s almost like taking his money under false pretences.

"But, look here!" he added suddenly. "I need a drink. And there isn't an empty table to be seen anywhere. Why not make it an excuse to crash in on him?"

## XVI

In the easy manner which was the rule at *Hinty's* they had claimed his company, pleading that they might share his table until another became vacant. Under Daniel Hinty's genial influence, the three of them had drunk together; lightly, casually, they had discussed the heat, the latest political situation, the festive, holiday air of the town. They had introduced themselves to each other. . . . "John Granger Lee," he had said, though the name conveyed nothing to them. Then, as he had planned to do, Hinty found a plausible excuse and disappeared.

"So you like Tsingtao!" Jennie exclaimed when she and John Lee were alone. Yet she seemed to remember having uttered that comment before; so that, when he had answered it again with his slow, smiling nod, she could not think of anything more to say. Perhaps she ought to be leaving him.

But at last she took courage and spoke of *Hinty's*.

"What do you think of this place?" she asked. "I think I've seen you here before."

A slight hint of colour came to his pale cheeks.

"Yes, I've been here fairly frequently," he admitted. "I'm on holiday, sick-leave actually, and if it's too hot to sleep—and I don't sleep very well in these

days—there’s precious little to do except come to a place like this, or walk about.”

He was silent for a moment, as he gave his strange enigmatic gaze to the movements of Nadya Skolnikova. Laughing musically at their flattered protests, Nadya was skilfully weaning a couple of semi-drunk Norwegian sea-captains from the bar, and shepherding them to the more expensive dance-room.

“Well,” he was continuing musingly, “you ask me do I like this place. A difficult question to answer! For I suspect that, like Mr. Hinty, you’ve some sort of business interest here. But, frankly, if the whole place were wiped out by an earthquake, I couldn’t be very sorry. Yes, your friend Hinty surprises me. He struck me as being a decent sort of fellow who might have a conscience somewhat above this sort of racket.”

Yet he grinned suddenly.

“No, I’m not going to apologize to you for having said that,” he exclaimed. “But don’t take it too seriously. One half of me is thinking like a hypocrite. I came here because—well, I enjoy being a spectator, I imagine, even though I don’t particularly want to enter into the things I see people doing.”

He paused to mark a burst of applause and laughter from the adjacent dance-room. The cabaret was now in progress, and, with her skirts lifted and her dainty knees flashing, Nadya Skolnikova was impersonating a famous film actress.

“Yes,” he continued when his eyes had dwelt a little lingeringly on that sight of her. “There’s *life*



here . . . a lot of life; many moods of it . . . and all conveniently centred in one small compass.

“And perhaps I haven’t seen too much of life!” he added almost whisperingly.

It was a strange speech for a man of his years to be making, and in that place. It reminded her somewhat of that distant day when she, a very small and only half-understanding child, had seen her uncle come and make farewell to her parents before he went next day to the War in Flanders. “Well, cheerio! And I’ll come back. But it seems only like yesterday that I was trying to spin a top,” he had uttered wistfully. And he had *not* come back. But only a young man might legitimately speak like that—a very young man.

She would not betray her curiosity about him, however.

“Well, I’ve tried to imagine Mr. Hinty getting his living in some other way,” she murmured, subtly changing the subject. “It might be difficult for him, if he’s done nothing else. And he’s generous. He gives his money away almost as fast as he makes it. As for these girls here, well, I hope I’m not catty; but, if they don’t choose to be saints, it’s hardly his fault. He pays them generously enough—far better than any other cabaret-proprietor does.

“Yes,” she added, frowning at her memories, “he even pays their hospital expenses when they’re sick.”

But later she could put that discreet question to him.

“You say you’re on sick-leave, Mr. Lee. Where have you come from?”

He seemed embarrassed suddenly, but, after a moment's hesitation, he answered her.

“I come from up-river . . . the Yangtse river, of course.”

He frowned then, and glanced down to the dance-room. Nadya Skolnikova's cabaret act had just finished. She was taking her applause, bowing, retreating, blowing kisses, returning bird-like to the floor again.

“That girl seems to be the soul of happiness,” he murmured.

“I wonder!” she almost retorted, but she must not let him elude her again.

“Do I know the place?” she asked. “I was up-river myself some time ago. Nanking!”

“It's hardly likely,” he answered. “I'm days and weeks beyond Nanking . . . Chwan Hu, a little place far beyond the Ichang gorges. And that's far enough, you'll say. Chwan Hu! You wouldn't know it.”

“What do you do there?”

“Do?” . . . Did he seek another tantalizing vision of Nadya, or had one embarrassed him again? But he faltered; he glanced down to the ballroom once more. “Well, I'm quite unimportant,” he tried to assure her.

“But, look here!” he protested with a grin. “This is sick-leave—holiday! And I have to leave here in about ten days. Perhaps I'm trying not to think of work.”

And then the strange, intense blue of his eyes was heightened in an expression that was almost of anger.

“I'm a fool!” he exclaimed, and his look seemed to

utter a wild, uncouth challenge. "Why shouldn't I tell you? . . . Smile as much as you please, Miss Davidson—I'm a missionary!

"It's true," he continued whisperingly. "Even though you find me in *Hinty's*, I'm trying to teach *God* to people! I'm a missionary.

"Yes, and I've got a wife somewhere!"

At which he got suddenly to his feet.

"Excuse me," he blurted. "I think I'll be on my way."

## XVII

She had persuaded John Granger Lee to sit down again.

"Really!" she was gently chiding him. "I'm trying not to be too annoyed with you. You have a wife, you say; you teach *God*! Very well! But why do you have to apologize for these things? Or, if you're not apologizing for them, if you're defending them, why need you let this place offend them so terribly? Which is quite apart from the fact that you're with someone who may not entirely reflect her surroundings."

There came his slow head-shake.

"You needn't tell me anything about yourself," he interrupted her. "You belong here even less than I do, I fancy.

"Still, that's your own story," he continued grimly. "As for the rest of what you've said—well, you're right! I'm behaving like a fool. And it's the way I've

been ever since I came to Tsingtao. . . . Anyhow, now you see what's eating me. I can't just make up my mind about myself.”

She had read of the missionaries in China. Who hadn't indeed? Almost weekly, the newspapers published the news of one of their number being murdered at the whim of out-of-hand soldiers, or kidnapped and held for ransom by bandits. And lately, to increase the horror of those kidnappings, the missionary authorities had yielded to the pressure put upon them by their fellow white men, and, in a desperate endeavour to end the evil, were refusing to pay ransoms. Thus, a man falling into the hands of the bandits might hope at the most for early death as an escape from weeks and months of lingering torture. Yet, notwithstanding this, the zeal and courage of the missionaries seemed even greater. But was it worth it? the average person asked.

She was seeking to discourage his mood.

“Tell me more about your work,” she murmured. “From what one reads about it nowadays, it seems extraordinarily heroic.”

“Heroic! I can see you haven't been out here very long!” he retorted with a laugh. “Walk into that bar over there, and you'd get a different opinion about us. Teaching the yellow man to be as good as his white master isn't exactly popular with our people. As for heroism—well, it's very much the same psychology. The only hero that people recognize is the hero of history, the man who had a brave uniform, a sword in his hand . . . *destroyed* something, in short.



"Still, perhaps I sound too much like a Socialist," he commented on that speech. "I'll answer your question."

He began to talk of his work. He was the principal of one of those much criticized institutions wherein, in order to impress itself upon an unenlightened and indifferent people, Christianity must first serve their physical needs.

"We have an orphanage there," he said, "a school, a hospital, a clinic for out-patients. In fact, so urgently do we have to devote ourselves to healing and feeding and clothing them that it's a marvel we're able to give them any religious instruction at all."

He frowned at a burst of ribald song from the bar.

"And I suppose that's why most people out here sneer at us," he continued. "They say that, instead of getting genuine converts, we're *buying* the faith of these people."

"Yes! And it may in many cases be true," he sighed. "I wonder how they would receive us if we had nothing to offer them except words."

Yet, as he talked on, that doubt seemed to be forgotten. There came his enthusiasm; his strange, intense fervour. The missionary schools of China had produced men who now, among their own people, were honoured and famous, he said. The missionary hospitals were banishing the superstitious horrors of native "medicine" with the latest wonders of scientific healing. . . . "Yes, even if Christianity must wait for a while, it's gaining ground," he cried. "If we haven't

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yet sown the seed, we're preparing the soil for it. We're preparing people's minds. When at last we've won them over with the practical things, the other and spiritual things must fall into place naturally. They cannot fail to."

She pondered that speech, questioning pardonably its optimism. Christianity and enlightenment that came long ago to a Western world had failed to save it, it seemed. Indeed, when bitterly one contemplated a civilization that was torn wherever one looked with wars and rumours of war, it seemed that Christianity was already dead; that, ironically, it had lived only in that time of the world's ignorance and darkness.

But she would not hurt him with this.

"Fine!" she exclaimed. "It sounds wonderful."

Unexpectedly he grinned at her.

"Do you really mean that?"

"Why not?" she retorted, and now she spoke sincerely. "Anything's fine and wonderful if it seeks to improve humanity."

"Ay!" he agreed. "But those who scoff at us would probably claim we're not improving humanity; they'll probably argue that we're corrupting a happy, carefree aboriginal into a semi-educated misfit. And there's a little to be said for the contention.

"But you're a very unusual woman," he added suddenly and unexpectedly.

She made an amused murmur. Yet she could not refrain from reading into his speech a hint of patronage. It now provoked her slightly bitter after-thought.

"Why should I be unusual because I understand you? Or am I unusual only because you meet me in *Hinty's*?"

He was silent for a moment. Then, embarrassed newly, he nodded.

"Which brings us back to where we started!" he exclaimed miserably. "Yes, why am I here at all?"

She shrugged her shoulders, wondering as she had wondered several times during that conversation—did she admire him, or did she despise him slightly?

"As long as you don't apologize for it again, it hardly matters," she commented. "I expect you're here like most people—killing time. Still, because one touches pitch one isn't necessarily defiled, you know."

She was forgetting herself, however. He was ill—mentally ill, perhaps—and she was hardly being generous.

"Anyhow," she added quickly, "now that you're feeling better, you'll soon be back at Chwan Hu . . . your work . . . your colleagues. Oh, and you have a wife, you said! She's there at Chwan Hu with you, I take it?"

But immediately she regretted that utterance.

"A wife at Chwan Hu?" he echoed. "No! My wife is far away—England! I shall never see her again, probably. She's—well, you might as well know it; I don't want to see her again.

"And perhaps that's why I'm sick!" came his tense whisper. "Waiting, waiting, all these years . . . God forgive me, tied like a dog to a post."

But he recovered himself.

“I’m becoming melodramatic. Sorry!” he exclaimed. “And the hysterics still require an explanation. She ran away . . . went to someone else. And a divorce? Well, there won’t be any . . . ever!”

“Never?” she queried, and saw his tragic grin. “You don’t believe in divorce, you mean. Or perhaps, because you’re a missionary, your superiors wouldn’t approve of it.”

Grimly he chuckled.

“Their opinions might not matter,” he answered. “Still, it won’t happen. Four years ago she was certified insane. Perhaps you’ll realize what that means! An insane person is beyond the law, absolutely. . . . And she’s incurably insane!”

How did one find words for him? Such a speech might tell of a man’s bitterest tragedy; yet again it might tell nothing! It all depended on the man himself, his reactions, whether those happenings had left him scarred or unaffected. . . . “Tied like a dog to a post!” he had uttered, and it spoke restraint, deprivation, hunger. But, in this China of the white man’s exile, many men had made some such utterance. It came craving one’s pity like the well-remembered whine of a beggar. It did not necessarily wring one.

Perhaps he was different, however. One remembered, for instance, the naïve little story which Anna the dance-partner had told of him. One remembered, too, that he was a missionary; a man who taught *God*, to use his own words. One hoped!

“I’m sorry!” she heard herself murmur. “Very



sorry!" It sounded cold, inadequate, insincere perhaps. Still, what else might one say to him, even in charity?

When eventually he had gone, she was joined by Hinty and one of the cabaret's more regular patrons, a local storekeeper named Brennan.

"Huh! a missionary on the loose!" Brennan exclaimed, when she had told some little of John Granger Lee's story. "Why didn't we think of it, Hinty? It fits him exactly. . . . Damned funny!"

Brennan saw her frown. He laughed.

"Huh, you women are too soft!" he continued. "Don't think I've got anything against religion itself. My only grouse is against the people who bring it into contempt. Either they're a bunch of crazy Aunt Betties who think this nigger-kissing racket's more romantic than staying home and feeding the hungry; or else they're a pack of professional Bible-punching bums like this guy——"

She interrupted him almost coldly.

"If he can be frank enough to doubt the value of what he's doing, he's sincere enough, I imagine."

At which Brennan laughed again.

"Sure, and he's sincere enough to spend his sick leave where he can see a leg or two!" he retorted hugely. "And he can't get a divorce, eh? Well, if that isn't too bad! Still, they were putting that little joke in the museum far back as the alligator's wisdom-teeth."

She shrugged her shoulders and moved away. There

was an answer to that speech, surely. But was it worth it? Brennan would hardly understand.

Nor would Brennan have understood those words which later she uttered to Hinty:

“Danny, perhaps I’m a fool to be bothering about him, but be a dear . . . try and see what’s happening. He’s standing at some horrible and dangerous cross-roads—just like you yourself were, Danny! Yes, let’s try to get hold of him—before it’s too late. Ask him to dinner . . . make him laugh . . . get him drunk! Anything!”

## XVIII

Jennie and Nadya Skolnikova were in ever-increasing contact with each other. With Daniel Hinty’s happiness and success so largely depending on them, it was inevitable perhaps.

Yet, strangely and to the surprise of everyone, there had been no recurrence of that early quarrel between them. The subject of their respective relationship with Hinty seemed to have been tacitly shelved. One saw only their growing respect for each other; possibly, in the case of Nadya’s regard for Jennie, a half-grudging admiration. Jennie, too, could be grateful for the Russian girl’s never-failing quick-wittedness, her gaiety, her optimism; and she could be wrung sympathetically because she knew how much genuine heart-ache those things concealed. Yes, in her unthinking, pagan way, Nadya might still find pleasure with some good-look-

ing and care-free scallywag occasionally; yet, for all this, she loved Hinty; her slavish and futile adoration of him became more apparent each day.

Jennie's reaction to Nadya's strange, new infatuation was something which she had not yet been able to define. Was she jealous of Nadya? She could not say, but it was certainly not the jealousy of a woman who fears only for herself. Rather might it be the jealousy of the proud craftsman who, having begun the fashioning of something dignified and worthy, permits no alien hand to touch it until his task is done. . . . "Yes," was sometimes her thought, "when he's more sure of himself, perhaps I can move on. Perhaps he'd do without me, if Nadya could only convince him."

At which would come that vision of them . . . Nadya and Hinty together; marrying probably; finding in their new respect for each other the happiness which had eluded them before.

But could that happen? Sometimes his unconscious indifference to Nadya amazed one. There was that day when Jennie had interrupted his reading of a newly acquired volume of *Shakespeare* to remark that the morrow was Nadya's birthday.

"*Which* Nadya?" he retorted. "There are about a dozen different Nadya's downstairs."

Then he grinned.

"Oh yes! *Your* Nadya, *our* Nadya!" he said indulgently. "Nadya Skolnikova! Remind me to give her a present. . . . Marvellous the way you've fallen for each other!"

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Had that been his genuine forgetfulness of Nadya, or merely his clever teasing? She did not know. Anyhow, it was sufficient to indicate his new tranquility, his perfect contentment.

As for his comment on her relationship with Nadya, well, it might be an exaggeration, but in substance at least it was true. One should be happy because of it.

Yet sometimes one sensed an immense and imminent threat to it all.

## XIX

There was that occasion, for instance, when Jennie found Nadya weeping.

“What’s the matter with me? . . . *nothing!*” the Russian girl tried laughingly to reassure her. “Just a pain in my tummy. Sure! Sweet of you! But run along!”

Yet eventually she was unhappily confessing it.

“I didn’t want to tell you, but I—well, it’s Hinty! And now call me a cheap little Vesuvius for boiling over again.”

Jennie laid a hand on her gleaming yellow hair.

“You don’t have to apologize, my dear,” she murmured. “I’ve known it a long time. You love him! Why not?”

Then impulsively she had added it.

“Nadya, we’re pals! What do you want me to do? . . . I imagine I’d do most things for you if—if it didn’t involve hurting him too much.”



Nadya looked up suddenly. There was surprise in that movement; incredulous questioning.

"You'd leave him, you mean?"

A pause; and then:

"If I thought you could make him happier—*yes!*"

"Make him happier? . . . Leave him?"

Smiling through her tears, yet still only half-believing, the Russian girl made tremulous, silvery echo of those words, her face upturned, her eyes wide and childlike and unashamed. At which once more must Jennie touch her hair, and muse a little on that vision of her. . . .

"How beautiful is a woman in love!" ran her thought. "How beautiful even her grief!"

But suddenly and passionately was Nadya breaking from her, getting to her feet. All in a moment could she amaze one.

"Jennie, don't leave him! For God's sake! You'd smash him! Can't you see it's just what he's fearing all the time? Yes, smash him!"

And then she made noisy mockery of that speech.

"Oh, God! Aren't we a couple of silly bitches! Anyone would think we drew our breath through him. God, let's find a drink!"

Jennie was slowly nodding.

"Perhaps we are!" she uttered. "But come along! What's on your mind about Danny? . . . I'd been thinking he was happier lately."

There came Nadya's brief, bitter laugh.

"You'd think so, to look at him! Sure, and so did

I, at first. But, Jennie, that calm, ritzy exterior of his doesn't mean a thing! It's just that he's been a good pupil.”

She paused for a moment, choosing her words with care.

“Yes,” she continued, “you’ve taught him something which this poor, emotional fool couldn’t acquire in a thousand years. You’ve taught him your good old-fashioned, aristocratic British *snootiness*. And you don’t have to fight me over the word. I’m not trying to insult you. But—*snootiness*? Well, if you’re snooty, you don’t weep at a funeral, for instance; you don’t show fear; in fact, you don’t show too much of anything. *Bad form! Not done!* As for loving anybody, well, even if a girlie’s just promised to marry a guy, she doesn’t sprinkle him with star-dust all at once. No, she remains in the perpendicular for a while. . . . ‘Well, that’s that! Funnyface, give me a fag!’ she says.”

She grinned at Jennie’s amused laughter.

“Sure, and I’m exaggerating!” she exclaimed. “But I think you understand me. . . . You’ve taught him things; how to keep his hands still; how to put a chain on his emotions. Yeah, and you don’t have to be sorry for it. I like him that way. You’ve made a man out of him. And if ever I’ve said otherwise, I guess I was only trying to hurt you.

“But now you’ve made him that way,” she continued almost passionately, “don’t blame him if he can’t be any other way; don’t blame him if he becomes a little

bit snooty too; don't blame him if he laughs when all he wants to do is weep perhaps. . . . Sure, but I'd better stop! I'm angering you. In any event, there's such a thing as going to hell and minding my own business."

Softly Jennie was answering her.

"It *is* your business—yours more than mine. Yes, you love him! And I'm not angry. But, Nadya, even now you're not telling me everything. Why is he unhappy about me? Is it because I can't love him?"

Nadya nodded.

"And because he thinks you'll go away, Jennie."

Yet her gaze faltered; she was miserably tearful again.

"No, perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps I'm only *fearing* he'll be unhappy," she now tortured herself. "But, Jennie! Jennie! I've got to ask you something. . . ."

She paused. Perplexingly, she shook her head. . . . "No, no! I'm a fool. Forget it, Jennie!". . . Then wildly that confession was wrung from her.

"Jennie, *this man! This missionary!* I know it's not my business. But why must you go on seeing him?"

Jennie winced. For a moment she stood speechless and resentful. Yet she must heed again that swift, passionate torrent which was the voice of Nadya's misery. . . .

"Jennie, for God's sake don't misunderstand! It's for Danny's sake—not mine! I'm not trying to make him hate you; I'm trying to keep him loving you . . . loving you, I said. And if you call me a hypocrite I

can't help it. But I want him *happy* . . . anyway . . . loving you, forgetting me . . . any bloody way, as long as he's happy.

“Yes,” she sobbed, “it would break his heart!”

At last was Jennie answering her. She laughed. Lightly she took Nadya's hand and kissed it; for a moment she held it to her breast.

“Shut up!” she cried. “Don't be such a dramatic little fool.”

And then, sitting down suddenly, she stared blankly before her.

“Oh, God! We women!” she breathed.

## XX

It was true. She had been seeing John Granger Lee rather frequently. There had been nothing clandestine in their relationship; in fact, often had Daniel Hinty joined them, taking them out to the hills in his car or accompanying them to the beach. And though the two men had nothing in common, Hinty liked the missionary, she fancied; at least, he was sorry for him.

Yet, now that Lee had come so subtly into their lives, she could re-examine herself and see that she had been indiscreet. Undoubtedly she was taking Hinty's friendly tolerance a little too much for granted.

“Nadya, I guess you're right,” she exclaimed suddenly. “Danny's been fine, but I can't expect him to go on wet-nursing Mr. Lee for ever. . . . Tell me, has he ever said anything about it?”



"Said anything? You should know Danny better!" Nadya reproved her. "He'd rather cut his tongue out. . . . But there are others."

"Then, people are talking!"

"Sure! Just like poor auntie at a gin-feast."

"The girls, you mean?"

"Yes, and the men; the people who matter! . . . Old Carson! Brennan! Danny's own pals. And don't get 'em wrong. They're not trying to pull the bed-spread off you exactly. But what they can't understand is just how he can *teach* you anything. God! He's a flat tyre."

Jennie smiled.

"Well, if that's all they say, it isn't too bad," she commented. "Anyhow, cheer up. In a very few days he'll be on his way most likely. We shall never see him again."

"But, Nadya, I can't help feeling sorry for him," she had to add impulsively. "And there's a whole lot in him that's fine and courageous. If people call him a flat tyre, then it's their shortcoming—not his. It's easy to look manly when you're sitting astride a beer-barrel. Still, it's just as manly to face the ridicule and leave the beer-barrel alone."

Nadya grimaced.

"You can forget what the men think about him," she retorted. "Sure you're dead right about 'em. What the average man sees in anyone except himself wouldn't fill the eye of a needle. But you don't fool *me* about him, Jennie. He's crazy about you . . . hungry! God,

if you don't watch your step, he'll make you sorry.”

For a long time Jennie was silent, seeking to strip that warning of its exaggeration, yet acknowledging nevertheless its undeniable logic. She could still recall, for instance, the bitter, self-torturing mood which had distinguished Lee's last talk with her. He had referred once again to his unfortunate marriage; the fact that, under the rigorous English divorce law, nothing could free him from it except death. . . . “Her death! But I daren't think of it!” he had cried. “If only there were some other way!” And he had stared at her . . . stared . . . so that one shrank from it as from a hot and withering breath.

“Nadya, he's lonely,” she heard herself answering at last. “And, though he hasn't told me so, I rather fancy he's been true to her . . . true to his ideals, to be more exact.”

But if he mattered so little to her, why need she talk about him so much? She gave her companion a reassuring grin.

“Well, don't let's worry about him any more,” she exclaimed. “Nadya, I promise you, I won't do anything foolish . . . nothing to hurt Danny.”

Which earned for her Nadya's typically impulsive gratitude, her affectionate hug.

“And you're not sore with me, Jennie?” the Russian girl would have her yield.

“Sore? Not a bit!” Jennie answered. “I guess it took us a while to get used to each other, Nadya, but you're the greatest little sport I know.”

"Thanks . . . thanks, Jennie!" Crazily, Nadya's tears had to mingle with her laughter again. Yet, in her strange Slavonic way, she must pause again and frown.

"No, Jennie! Don't like me *too much*," she begged. "Yes, I'm your friend, but no woman is another woman's friend always. The best of us are—well, I know you hate the word, but there's no other word that fits it. Where two women and a man are concerned, the best of women can sometimes be bitches . . . absolute bitches."

Jennie laughed.

"And how!" she agreed. "But snap out of it. Come along and have a drink."

Yet, perplexingly, Nadya shook her head.

"There's something I've been trying to tell you—and for a long time," she answered. "And, Jennie, you've got to hear it."

She hesitated for a moment; then miserably she blurted it:

"That hospital! That hospital in Shanghai where I had my operation . . . where you went when you had that accident! Well, you won't like it, but I can't keep it shut up any longer. I know the rest of the story, Jennie. Yes, women talk—even nurses!"

"You mean?"

"I mean that when you had that accident you were going to have a child. . . . Oh, God! And now I've said it!"

Jennie looked at her—long, searchingly. Yet she

saw in Nadya's face only the expression of her most abject misery. Why should Nadya have confessed it, if it yielded her such hurt and humiliation? Why, and why again?

At last she nodded.

“Yes, it's true,” she whispered. “And I'm not the least little bit ashamed of it. But must it distress you so much, just because you didn't tell me?”

“Danny didn't know!”

“No, he didn't! Why should he? It wasn't his privilege to know. I came here like anyone else—to earn my bread!”

Suddenly, however, there came to her that thought which was surely the explanation.

“Nadya, are you trying to confess to me that you've told him?” she demanded.

“Have I told him?” . . . The Russian girl's eyes seemed to hold the demented fear of a hunted animal. . . . “Told him? Oh, God, if I tell him, Jennie, may I die, may I be struck dead!”

Yet, hard upon such passionate denial, Jennie heard that utterance which for ever afterwards, in her contact with Hinty, would cloud her days.

The Russian girl was standing up facing her. Now, in strange contrast to her mood of a moment ago, her voice was calm. In the smooth, protecting manner of an elder sister, she took Jennie's hands; she smiled.

“No, my dear,” she continued, “even the worst of us wouldn't plan a thing like that. But, Jennie, you must understand people, especially poor, crazy people



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like myself. It isn't the wickedness we *plan* to do; it's the thing that gets hold of us on the impulse . . . the devil in us, the bitch in us! Sure, I guess if I were angry enough, and drunk enough, and a knife were in my hand, I'd kill my own mother. And all the love that I'd had for her wouldn't mean a thing. . . . Yes, Jennie! That day when first I knew he didn't want me any more, I nearly told him. God forgive me, I did!"

And then, as though she had regretted that speech already, she let fall an impatient oath.

"Huh! I'm dramatizing myself again, just like poor Poll in a hen-house. Forget it, Jennie. That was a long time ago—when I didn't know you. I guess I've been thinking about that damned missionary too much. Forget it! All I meant to say was . . . Danny's fine! I know you wouldn't hurt him."

## XXI

It would not matter that Nadya might prefer to die rather than betray that secret. Friend though she was, fine and courageous and chivalrous though she was, the scheme of things to come must take no count of her. Nadya indeed would surely quarrel with that decision, weep or rave against what she might call its suicidal futility, its purposeless traffic with a dead Past; yet decision had been made. Come weal or woe, it mattered only now that Henty must be told!

How long overdue might be that moment of confes-

sing it to him, she could not hazard. Like that unbelievable change in the man himself, it had stolen on her subtly, unexpectedly; one could only look back and feel that, by a strange trick of memory, perhaps, the need to be honest with him had existed from the beginning. . . . Had he ever slobbered a drunken apology for being the Islington washerwoman's son? It seemed impossible.

She sat in her darkening sitting-room, wondering how she would approach him; with what particular background of *self*, with what particular vision of him to blend with it, with what goal before her. Did she love him? No, not even now! Only a great tenderness filled her, a wide and ever-growing sense of responsibility, of intimate caring. If any hurt were to befall him now, she could grieve and know it as her own.

No, she did not love him! But might it not amount to the same thing? To tell him, yet seek to justify herself, was surely to reveal her changing mood towards him, to give him assurance and promise where none had existed before. He might not think thus immediately, but slowly, in his lonely silences, it would dawn on him. . . . “She came to me free, aloof, independent. She owed me nothing; her secrets least of all. Yet now she tells me!” . . . Yes, confession would be a gift to him, the acknowledged readjustment of their status, the opening of a wide and limitless path beyond.

Nevertheless, confession must be made.

She went to him on an impulse when she heard him enter the apartment. She would see him before he took his bath and dressed. Yet, as she opened her door and called his name, she saw him coming towards her.

"Telepathy!" he exclaimed. "I was just about to look you up."

He flourished a typewritten letter.

"Come in," she answered; but she gave him a second glance. He looked grave and worried. Curiosity overcoming her, she forgot herself for a moment.

"I've got to go away," he surprised her. "Tonight! I've just managed to get a berth on a Japanese boat for Shanghai."

"Not bad news, I hope?" she murmured, and it was strange how her voice could hold a tremor.

"No," he assured her. "Nothing like that. Just an unexpected piece of business worry. My Shanghai solicitors want to see me urgently . . . a threatened law-suit against a firm in which I invested a slice of money a while ago. Tough! I'd thought of taking you and Lee out to Laushan tomorrow.

"Gosh! But don't look so scared!" he teased.

Then he stared at her more searchingly.

"You've been weeping!" he exclaimed.

She had been weeping, indeed. But she hesitated. To confess it would be to confess everything. Could she burden him with it now? He was preoccupied, worried; only a very grave matter would have called him away so suddenly.

"Danny," she retorted lightly, "your vast experience

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should have taught you that a woman's tears mean anything or nothing. Actually, I've been washing a piece of the Strand beach from my eye. I haven't been weeping at all.

“But how long will you be away?” she added a little anxiously.

He began clumsy calculation.

“Well, I can't expect this Japanese boat to make Shanghai until the morning after tomorrow. A day there, perhaps two, and there's always the chance of having to wait a day for a boat back. Six or seven days, let's say. And all for one legal pow-wow.”

“Seven days!” she echoed, and her spirits fell. How could she wait so long to tell him?

“Danny, is it so very serious?” she demanded then.

“I mean, are you really worried about it?”

He grinned.

“Well, the solicitors seem to think I ought to be,” he answered. “They've never been happy about the way I parted with that money . . . called me no end of a fool because I didn't consult 'em in the first place; though the business belongs to friends of mine—very old friends—and I hardly imagined they'd be getting themselves into hot water. Anyhow, it seems that I stand a chance of losing most of it.

“But what does it matter?” he tried to console himself. “I shouldn't be beggared exactly. Look here, if you don't want me to go, I'll wire them to come up here instead.”

She shook her head.



"That would be both expensive and timewasting," she reproved him. "No, you'll have to go. I'll help the 'boy' pack your things.

"But Danny, why not let me come with you?" she blurted suddenly.

"Come with me?"

Dignified as was this strange, new man before her, she saw his flattered surprise.

"Gosh! That would be great!" he exclaimed, and it was the excited utterance of a schoolboy almost.

But he recovered himself.

"Shanghai in *this* heat!" he reminded her. "You'd hate it. . . . But what did you think of doing, if you came? I mean, these solicitors won't be allowing me too much time for keeping you amused."

"I'll buy hats," she said. "And there's always Dora. But I was thinking I might be useful. Perhaps on the boat you could dictate a few notes on what you wanted to discuss with these solicitors. I could take a portable typewriter with me and resuscitate my shorthand. . . . Your confidential secretary, in short."

He laughed.

"It sounds princely!" he commented.

"Yes, and on the way back, when it was off your mind again, we could take things easily," she continued quickly. "Stroll the deck, air ourselves, pretend it was a trip to America we were taking."

He stared at her. Had he seen her so eagerly friendly before? He doubted it.

"Er—then, you'd really like it?"

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Only for a moment did she hesitate, and then:

“Yes, Danny. Why not? And we’d talk, get to know each other, swap our experiences of the old days. Good heavens, we haven’t even told each other about our own grandmothers!”

He stared at her again, marking her flushed cheeks, her excited breathing. That extraordinary enthusiasm could still puzzle him. Yet in a moment he had satisfied himself.

“By the way, have you seen Nadya today?” he asked artlessly.

“Er—yes,” she answered. “I was with her almost the whole afternoon.”

At which sagely he smiled and folded his letter, recalling Nadya’s time-honoured misdemeanour of taking her late-afternoon “tea” from the private stock of whisky and soda-water which he kept in his office.

“Ah, I thought so!” he commented. “Well, it’s good to see you so happy.”

And then he made a step nearer to her.

“Yes, you *are* happy nowadays?” he breathed. “Jennie, there was a time when I didn’t think it possible.”

“Don’t be absurd!” she retorted.

Laughing, she broke lightly away from him.

“But, Danny,” she reminded him, “if we don’t hurry, we’ll miss that boat.”

He was strangely silent. She heard his tense breathing.

“May I tell you something?” he said at last. “You’re the loveliest thing I’ve ever seen.”

Yet before she could think upon that speech, he had surprised her.

"Nevertheless, young lady, you're not coming."

"Any particular reason, elderly sir?" . . . She had been marvelling for a moment at the unexpected calmness of that refusal.

"Well, yes, several," he answered with a grin. "First of all, Shanghai's no place for you in this weather."

"Test me! Where heat's concerned I'm a perfect salamander."

"Secondly, this Japanese *maru* is hardly the *Queen Mary* for luxury."

"I'm a perfect Spartan, too!"

"Thirdly and finally, I was only just in time to get the last available berth on it."

"Which seems to settle it," she said resignedly. "But what are your other reasons?" She could not resist teasing him. At which he laughed.

"I said *thirdly and finally*," he reminded her. Yet he grew serious again.

"Well, there might have been other reasons, Jennie—bigger ones. If you and I were making that trip, people would talk too much about it. I'd want to smash 'em."

She laughed.

"Sweet of you, Danny. But have you ever thought of it! People might think just the same about our being here together."

He frowned. "Yes, they might," he agreed, and so solemnly did he say it that she almost laughed. "Still, it isn't quite the same. We're more under people's eyes

in this place. And don't forget—if you want to check up on a man and woman in China, it's the easiest thing. Servants talk! You just slip a five-dollar bill into the head boy's hand and he'll give you a full-length novel on them, not excluding the brands of tooth-paste they use.

“However,” he added, and he frowned even more deeply, “the feeling that people might get the wrong idea about you has been rather a lot in my mind lately. People respect us, I think; still, when the holiday season is over and the hotels are empty, what would you say to my getting you an apartment down at the Grand?”

“Why not? And a private staircase leading to it; my name in letters of purest gold on its door!” she teased him.

Yet suddenly she wanted to weep.

“Danny, why must you reverence me so much?” she pleaded with him. “Sometimes it's more than I can bear. I'm *not* wonderful, I'm *not* lovely. God, if you only knew me as I am!”

“Huh!” He grinned ruefully at his wrist-watch. “I shall have to change,” he exclaimed. “Jennie, come to the boat with me. But come alone. Don't bring anyone else.”

## XXII

He had changed; his packing was done; they had snatched a brief meal; they were on their way to the docks.

But now a strange silence was on her. The things



which, while she dressed, she had planned to say to him seemed to elude her. Perhaps she was tired; perhaps, nursing her sentiments about him too long, her mind had sickened and rejected them; perhaps, on the other hand, she was defeated only by the knowledge of that haste which was on them. So little could one say in a few minutes. Yet it was as though a baffling paralysis had seized her.

But was it only that? A few minutes earlier, when they stepped into the car, a queer absurdity had flashed upon her. . . . "He's going away. Supposing it's the very last ride I have with him?"

She had tried to dismiss it. She told herself that she had, indeed. . . . "You little fool!" she had mocked herself. But, again it came—gigantically now!

Still, it was nonsense. She was only tired and a little hysterical. She had been thinking about him all that day; there was a breaking-point, surely. She forced herself to a laugh.

"I'm quiet!" she uttered in harsh staccato. "Just like me! When you've gone I'll think of something to say."

And then, with that silence shattered, she could find the thought for him that might be more appropriate.

"Danny, don't be too long away!"

She heard his relieved sigh; she felt the touch of his hand.

"Thanks!" he murmured with a chuckle. "That's music! I'll hurry back just as soon as I'm through. I'll take a 'plane if I can get one."

“Fine!” she told him gratefully; though, ridiculously, she must immediately seek to deceive herself again.

“I’m thinking of the cabaret. It’ll seem strange there without you. And supposing someone starts a rumpus?”

He laughed. “Don’t worry!” he tried to reassure her. “You’ll find Nadya equal to any rumpus. She just loves a rough house. But I hadn’t overlooked it. Brennan’s promised to come in at nights and keep a very watchful eye on things. So has Carson.”

“Thanks,” she whispered, though she knew it to be absurd. “Thanks very much.”

But when again she lapsed into silence, she heard his sober challenge:

“Look here, Jennie! Something’s on your mind.”

She hesitated. Could she tell him? Even now it might not be too late. Yet again had come her pitying thought for him:

“A whole week . . . cut off from me . . . his mind . . . his work!”

No, it must be *her* hurt, *her* suspense—hers only. She turned to him.

“Perhaps!” she admitted, and gave him a rueful grin. But it served only as a cover for the glib evasion which was to follow it.

“Danny,” she began, and it might possibly be the truth, “I’m rather worried about Mr. Lee.”

“Poor devil, yes,” he murmured. “But what can one do for him! The cure’s in his own hands. Don’t

think I'm scoffing, but missionary work is more a job for women, I've always felt."

"Maybe! But I was hardly thinking of that. Danny, what shall I do if he asks me to go out with him again?"

"Do? Why, you'll go, of course."

And then he laughed uproariously.

"Oh, my God! Is that all that's worrying you?" he exclaimed.

"People might gossip about it, if you're away," she retorted.

At which he laughed the more.

"Well, let 'em!" he thundered hugely. "Take him out, shake the melancholy out of him in this car, give him a good time. . . . And don't forget to say 'good-bye' to him for me. I suppose he'll be gone by the time I come back."

But he turned to her suddenly. His boisterous manner softened. He gripped her arm.

"Thanks, Jennie," he murmured softly. "I didn't know you were thinking about it quite like that."

"Perhaps I wasn't. Perhaps I was thinking only of myself," she retorted laughingly. It might ease the ache of her pity for him.

They reached the dock. They were threading their way between stacks of newly landed merchandise to the waiting ship. A noise of escaping steam was in their ears; of bare-ribbed, hurrying coolies barking their clipped, urgent monosyllables; of winches and gear and resounding decks and companions. . . . Speech

would now be even more difficult than before. And as they reached the gangway he was looking anxiously at his watch.

“Hardly time to take you on board,” he said.

But perplexingly the ship was lingering beyond its scheduled time. Which set them grinningly congratulating themselves. Yet their joy in it was only a pretence, for the uncertainty of that protracted farewell could mock them, dispossessing the precious minutes of their worth. They could only squander the minutes . . . grin again, fall silent, or give huge exaggeration to trivialities, things that were irrelevant.

“When I come back, I’ll have that car overhauled,” he promised.

“Fine!” she rejoined, and the sight of a coolie’s perspiring neck held ridiculous fascination for her.

Then, abruptly, that spell on them was broken. A little Japanese bo’s’n was calling “friends ashore” at the entrance to the saloon. There came the first warning blast from the siren. One could know anguish again, swift, stabbing fear. She ceased to smile. He threw down his cigarette, stamping out its glow as though he effaced a sacrilege.

“Jennie, I’ll try and get a ’plane back.”

“Yes, do!”

And then that quick plea which had been torturing him an hour long:

“Jennie, marry me!”

Marry him! The immensity of it; and yet that absurd, chilling fear. . . .



“He’s going! Only another minute. His smile just then! That look in his eyes. Supposing I’m seeing these things for the last time?”

“Marry you!” she heard herself desperately answering. “Danny, I don’t know. But hurry back. I want to talk to you . . . about us . . . *me* . . . everything.”

“Friends ashore!” The few visitors to the undistinguished passenger-cargo vessel were trooping down the gangway; the deck-hands were loosening its ropes; the little Japanese *bo’s’n* stood rigid at its head, unsmiling, impatient.

Their hands met urgently; his eyes still pleaded.

“You mean . . . you mean you’ll think of it?” he blurted.

“Yes, Danny. But we must talk . . . talk.”

And then his back was to her. He was aboard. She must step aside to avoid the gangway as it clattered to the quay.

“Cheerio!” he cried from the rail. “God bless!”

“Cheerio! And God bless *you*! Danny, take care of yourself. Hurry back!”

Yet the fear on her! The terrible impotent sense of finality. This moment the last, maybe!

“Danny, listen!”

“What’s that? Yes, sure! With both ears.”. . . His receding voice!

“Danny, listen! . . . *Danny, I will!*”

But he did not hear. A great bellow from the ship’s siren obliterated it.

### XXIII

He had been gone two days.

To write to him would have been useless; a letter would not have reached him in time. But could she wire him? she had a dozen times asked herself.

Yet, uttered so abruptly on a commercial-looking printed form, that phrase would surely seem pretentious and ridiculous—*I will marry you!* . . . As impossible to say it thus as to shout it to him across a crowded street. It needed his warm, physical presence, his intimate nearness. Moreover, now that the pang of parting from him was over, one was beginning to think of him more normally. Yes, she might marry him—even now, and with no more than the ordinary day about her—but first must she talk. *How* she must talk!

She busied herself wherever she could find opportunity. The *shroff* and she made great “to-do” of besieging Hinty’s office and tidying his papers. They bought files for them. She and the *amah* attacked his bedroom, dismissing from it a score of old newspapers, a half-dozen pairs of shoes to be soled. In the early evening she took whisky-soda with Nadya, or watched her rehearsing some new solo-dance. “Sure, but doesn’t this place seem like a morgue without him!” Nadya would complain. There was also that daily encounter with John Granger Lee, the missionary.

But he came to the cabaret rarely. Instead, he telephoned her from his hotel. “I wonder whether you’d

care to take tea with me at the Strand," he might say. So that meeting him had ceased to be casual; soberingly, it implied appointment, consent. While now came his news that he would remain in Tsingtao a week longer.

He seemed fitter now, happier; his cheeks had filled, and the sea air and sunshine had given to his blond skin a light, golden tan. He seemed less haunted by his own thoughts. Only did his former strangeness return to him if he talked of England. But she had noticed something which puzzled her slightly. If she mentioned the cabaret he was silent, or changed the subject abruptly.

One afternoon he swam with her. He swam powerfully, she discovered. It gave him a suggestion of physical ruggedness which previously had been lacking. Long after she had tired and returned to the beach, he came bounding from the water to tease her because she would not enter it again. She made him sit down, watching the play of his muscles while he dried his hair.

"I didn't know you could swim so well," she complimented him. "What else can you do?"

"Well, when I was twenty-one and in the Army, I rather fancied myself as a middle-weight boxer," he answered. "Oh, and until I put my knee out I was fairly useful as a soccer centre-half."

Then, seeing her surprised musing, he laughed.

"Why not?" he protested. "A man doesn't have to be a mutt just because he's a missionary."

“Still, that’s the unfortunate impression one usually creates,” he added a little ruefully.

It was a healthful change from his usual conversation, she reflected. Thinking to encourage it, she began to tease him.

“I shall have to find you a job at *Hinty’s*—throwing out the drunks after midnight.”

“I might enjoy throwing ’em out!”

“Or I could get Nadya Skolnikova to bill you as an extra turn . . . ‘Battling Lee, the Fighting Parson,’ for instance!”

Yet gradually his grin had died.

“Look here! It’s not my business,” he retorted, “but your contact with that place puzzles me.”

“Why?”

He shook his head.

“It’s not my business,” he reiterated. It seemed as though he would once more avoid the subject.

But presently, after an unrehearsed reference to *Hinty’s*, he unexpectedly returned to it.

“You seem to be happy there!” he exclaimed, and frowned.

“Perhaps I am,” she answered, a little challengingly. And then, with her curiosity and resentment growing, she had uttered it.

“It’s my bread-and-butter. It’s honest bread-and-butter. Why do you object to it?”

“Bread-and-butter?” He echoed that phrase almost doubtingly.

And then he murmured his strange apology.



"I beg your pardon," he said, and fell awkwardly silent.

But she had not done with the subject.

"I think I know what's in your mind," she said.

She waited for his answer, but it did not come. He avoided her gaze.

"You're thinking of Hinty," she continued. "Well, don't get the wrong idea about him. Hinty is—well, Hinty's made of better stuff than his surroundings suggest, perhaps. And you'd better understand him and me a little more thoroughly. Hinty's my employer——"

He interrupted her.

"You don't have to say it," he uttered. "I *know* what you are. Nothing, no one could ever persuade me differently." His words fell like a lingering caress. "I think I know what Hinty is too.

"Though it's only you who could have made him that way," came his strange, almost soliloquizing whisper.

"But, Jennie," he continued, and surely he used her name for the first time, "when originally you went there, I imagine you felt less enthusiastic about that cabaret."

"It was a business proposition. It is still."

"Quite! You went there, not because it attracted you. Let's say you needed a job. But you like it now; and it's either because you've learned to tolerate it, or because of Hinty himself. Both, perhaps."

She shrugged her shoulders.

“You may be right,” she admitted. “But why need I look back? Perhaps I’m *better* because of it. Perhaps it’s taught me to know myself. What’s to be learned by keeping a wall about one’s self? And the days pass; one changes. Why analyse myself if I’m content?”

“Which is just the danger,” he retorted. “Mahomet gets to the mountain rarely. More often the mountain must come down to meet Mahomet. Sometimes it comes too far.”

She smiled.

“Mahomet is Hinty, I suppose, and I the mountain?”

“Yes.”

“And you think the mountain has toppled down to the valley and lost itself?”

“No. But it could happen. Pity is often an exacting master.”

“Pity! How do you know it’s pity? It might be more.”

“I doubt it.”

She was silent. She could not argue with him on that. As easily might she argue with herself . . . and fail.

“Anyhow, I know Hinty’s purpose,” she said, evading that issue. “There’s nothing cheap or ignoble in it.”

“Quite,” he agreed. “I think I know it too. But Hinty’s purpose has its foundations in you, and you alone. Without you he falls down. He becomes

merely the dirty-thumbed cabaret proprietor again."

She frowned, resenting that speech. Nevertheless, she must give it her long, searching thought.

"Perhaps," she whispered; and then . . . "No, he won't fall down—whatever happens. He'll go on. No one can stop him. Nothing!"

And yet she paused again.

"Please!" she begged unhappily. "Why must we discuss him so much? . . . Come on, I've changed my mind! Give me a start, and I'll race you out to the raft."

But later, when they went from the beach to the Strand Hotel for tea, he made an oblique return to that subject. He began to question her about her earlier life in England; her home, her education, her employment with old Henderson.

To her answers he gave his grave, nodding approval; for familiar with that English scene, he saw the conventional respectability of her upbringing as clearly as he knew his own. Yet, often as she answered him, her smile was perilously near to tears. Which set him eventually abandoning that curiosity and apologizing to her.

"Sorry! Perhaps I ought not to have reminded you of it. Yes, I guess you're homesick."

"Who isn't, sometimes?" she retorted, and now he saw her frank, unrestrained emotion. But she fought it down. She laughed.

"Still, don't class me with those dear old hypocrites who are always offering to give a year's pay for the

smell of a London subway,” she added. “Half of the time they don’t mean it.”

He made no comment, but passed his empty tea-cup to her. She fancied, however, that she knew his mind about her. . . .

“Yes, I’m puzzling him,” ran her thought. “And even more than before! The English respectability, the polite school, the church-going. Yet—China, *Hinty’s*! He can’t quite reconcile them. Poor man! Even now he probably thinks I’m an adventuress.”

And then he surprised her.

“We need women of your type and education in the mission field,” he exclaimed. “Had you ever thought of it?”

She stared her surprise, trying not to grin.

“Why, no!” she answered at last. “I’m afraid I hadn’t. I’d always imagined that missionary women were—well, don’t misunderstand me, but a class somewhat apart from the rest of us. . . . More courageous, more earnest, I mean.”

He laughed.

“You don’t have to spare my feelings,” he teased her. “You’d better say it . . . *Blue-stockings*! Man-haters! The sort of women who wear the wrong hats and elastic-sided boots. Yes, that’s the popular idea of ’em, I suppose.

“Still, don’t get us all wrong,” he continued gaily. “Perhaps I’m not a good advertisement for it, but mission work is probably just the reverse. It’s cheerfulness, comradeship, putting happiness and laughter



into people's lives where none existed before. Which is just the important point which our critics fail to see. As for pushing religion down people's throats, well, as I think I've said before, there's no virtue in preaching the Sermon on the Mount to a man if you don't first practise it. No, first must you feed his empty stomach, heal his sores, teach him to use his mind. . . . Yes, I wish you could come to Chwan Hu and see our methods. You'd fall for them, I think."

"You are happy there?"

Only for an instant did he pause; and then:

"Yes, very! Why not?"

She smiled encouragingly. "It must be very fascinating," she answered non-committally. Yet she wondered again, as she had wondered many times: Was he truly happy in the strange career which he had set himself, or did he merely bludgeon himself into it?

But now he was elaborating his theme.

"We're not all missionaries in the strict sense, you know. I mean, we're not all engaged in teaching religion. In fact, the majority of my people are laymen . . . doctors, bacteriologists, teachers, and so on. They've no contact with the evangelical side whatever. In fact, if you saw the way some of 'em try to dodge even a Sunday morning service, you'd say they were bigger heathen than the Chinese. . . . Which reminds me! I've just had a letter from Chwan Hu. My personal secretary has run away and married an American naval officer, I hear. What about it?"

That question did not take her entirely by surprise. She laughed, professing to misunderstand it.

“Well, I suppose you’ll have to forgive the poor girl and send her a wedding-present,” she answered.

“But don’t your people appear to be rather lax?” she added with genuine curiosity. “I’d always imagined that even if they aren’t all actual missionaries, they have to be—well, of the missionary type.”

The missionary type! He seemed to frown at that phrase.

“Well, yes,” he admitted. “They have, at least, to declare themselves as practising Christians. And, of course, in the case of the higher-paid people, they have to be approved from that point of view by our headquarters.

“Still, we’re all practising Christians, I hope,” he sought to remind her, “whether we’re working in the mission field or selling typewriters. Tell me that you or the average person doesn’t feel that way about it, and I won’t believe you.”

She smiled—non-committally again. How did one answer him? And now she could be almost sure of it! . . . “He’s apologizing for it,” came her thought. “Afraid to sound too unmanly! Just like a silly school-boy, ashamed of too much respectability.”

He was leaning across the table suddenly.

“Look here!” he challenged her. “There’s a vacancy at Chwan Hu, I said—for someone who’ll act as my personal secretary. I’m asking you. Why not take it? If you want it, it’s yours. And don’t think I’m offering

it to you merely because we're friends. You're educated, experienced in office routine; it's a job you're fitted for——"

Now, however, her answer was ready for him.

"It's kind of you," she interrupted him gently. "But Chwan Hu's rather a long way off—a little too far. And what about your superiors—your headquarters—the dear people who'd sit in judgment on my respectability?"

"They'd accept my own opinion of you. And why not?" he added almost fiercely.

But she shook her head.

"No!" she said firmly. "It's kind of you, but I'm staying here. . . . Come, let's go. I ought to be back."

He got obediently to his feet. Nevertheless, he paled.

"I can't understand you," he protested, as they walked to the car. "What exactly is your purpose in life? It puzzles me."

"It need not!" she retorted; and now he saw that he had angered her. "One doesn't necessarily have a purpose. However, if you insist on my having one, it's probably this—and I'll use your own words!—'Cheerfulness, comradeship, putting happiness and laughter into people's lives where none existed before,' I think you said. I believe I'm doing it now."

"With Hinty?"

"Yes, with Hinty."

But he had not yet done with her.

“Hinty is only one man,” he retorted grimly. “Supposing he fails you?”

“Fails me?”

Once more as she dwelt in that strange, bitter-sweet memory of her farewell to Hinty, there came that absurd, unreasoning fear. “Danny, hurry back!” She wanted to cry it aloud.

But the missionary heard only her laughter.

“We’re talking of his happiness, not mine,” she retorted gaily. “If he fails me—well, we’ll congratulate him, of course. The patient doesn’t usually fail his doctor until he’s better!”

## XXIV

Three days had passed. There came to her at breakfast time Hinty’s second and lengthy telegram. His business with his solicitors was ended, he said. Moreover, they now held the opinion that the threatened law-suit might be avoided, and with not too great an expense to himself. But what reassured her the most was the news that he was leaving Shanghai immediately. She could suddenly laugh at her fears. He would now be on his way. On that next night she would be seeing him.

She gave that news to the head boy, to the *amah*, to the chauffeur who would take her to meet him at the docks. Everything must be ready for him. . . . And then, the door closing behind them both, the privacy, the long, long talk!



"No, not tomorrow night," she answered John Granger Lee over the telephone. "Danny will be back."

And she flourished Hinty's telegram in corroboration as she said it.

But she had to listen to Lee, nevertheless. They had not met since they swam together at the Strand beach, he reminded her. If he had offended her then, he was sorry.

"And tomorrow night? Well, it's thirty-six hours away!" he protested.

She would not commit herself. She had work to do that day, she pleaded. She would telephone him when she was less busy. At which, forgetting him, she sought the head boy again. Had Master's winter suits come back from the cleaners? she wanted to know.

But, as her excitement subsided, she thought of Lee again, reproaching herself for having been too curt with him. And if ever she had vaguely feared him, she might now fortify herself with the thought that it was probably the last occasion on which she would have to be alone with him again. Tomorrow she would dismiss him from her fears with the laugh that mingled with Hinty's.

Next day she telephoned him. She would see him that morning, she said.

"Though I ought to be back here for tiffin," she added.

Yet the stipulation seemed niggardly, cowardly perhaps; and her afternoon was free, she knew. So that,

when inevitably he suggested that she took tiffin with him, she surprised him with her reaction.

“Well, as long as I’m back by early evening, it doesn’t matter,” she answered. “Let’s eat out in the hills. It will be cooler there. I’ll pack a hamper.”

She smiled at his delighted exclamation: “A whole day out in the hills! Why, that’s great!” . . . But he had probably overlooked something. If they went to the hills, Hinty’s chauffeur would be with them from the time they started until the moment in which they said farewell. . . . Hinty’s chauffeur! That propinquity could seem like the sure, safe shield of Hinty himself.

She dressed; she ordered the car; she went to see if the “boy” had finished packing the luncheon hamper. Such was her gaiety at the thought of Hinty’s return that she ordered the “boy” to pack a bottle of champagne also. And if Lee did not care to share it with her, it would not matter. She would drink it, nevertheless. . . . Danny returning at eleven that night! A dozen or so short hours!

When all was ready, she wrote a note for the “boy” to give to Nadya Skolnikova.

*Sorry not to be seeing you this afternoon. Am off to the hills with my missionary.*

*Affectionately, J.*

Nevertheless, it was a pity that she could not first have had a chat with Nadya. A laugh and a jest at his expense would have made that trip with Lee sound

a little more logical. And perhaps that note should have included some reference to Hinty's homecoming. But the "boy" had borne it away, and already she was ten minutes late.

Singing to herself, she hurried downstairs.

## XXV

They spread their meal on a smooth flat rock. A tree shaded them, jutting out at an acute angle from the craggy hillside in which the rock was set. Only a few yards away a tiny cascade of water tumbled musically down to an inky pool, the vegetation lush and green about it.

Lee was now perching himself on the edge of the rock and jovially dismissing the Chinese chauffeur who had helped him to carry the hamper.

"I'm hungry!" he cried. "Gosh! And I could drink the sea dry!"

He surprised her by the eager way in which he uncorked the champagne. "Splendid! I'd been fearing you'd bring me ginger-ale!" he exclaimed.

But this was not the only thing in which he had surprised her. He had surprised her a whole morning long . . . his gaiety, his laughter, his noisy, rollicking exhortations to the chauffeur as the car had soared the steep hills; but, more than that—his indifference to her almost! Even her frequent references to Hinty's return had not dismayed him. "Great!" he had rejoined to one of them. "We must take the old boy out and fête him!"

What new thing was in his mind? she wondered.

They finished their meal. The watchful chauffeur clambered up to them from the road below; then, repacking the hamper, he left them and returned to the car, there to eat the native food which was more to his taste.

“Well, that’s that! And thanks for a marvellous tiffin!” Lee exclaimed. He stretched himself full-length across the rock and offered her a cigarette. “Great!” he sighed contentedly, and tossed his spent match-stick to a tiny lizard darting on the sunlit patch of earth beneath them.

“But you’re quiet!” he added suddenly, and gave her his teasing grin.

She could not deny it. Silently she had been wondering about him again. A thought had just struck her. . . . He was like a character in some work of fiction fashioned by an inexperienced and groping amateur; inconsistent, illogical, elusive, and vague always. She recalled her first meeting with him at *Hinty’s*, the way he seemed to shrink from the place, and yet again his strange, fevered hunger for it. She recalled that confession of his hopeless marriage—there had almost been hate in his heart then; she recalled the many and contradictory moods which he had given to the thought of returning to Chwan Hu. More vividly she recalled his frequent contempt for Hinty. . . . “A dirty-thumbed cabaret proprietor.” . . . or . . . “Supposing he fails you?”

And yet? . . . “We must take the old boy out and fête him!”



And now he lay there, a cigarette poised in his fingers, his eyes careless and dancing, his firm white teeth exposed in a grin that surely mocked her. . . . "In four days' time I'm saying good-bye to you," he had an hour ago said. But the utterance had been casual, contemptuous almost; it made her feel like a small and unconsidered schoolgirl.

"Quiet?" she echoed now. "I hadn't noticed it. Oh, but perhaps I was. I'd been thinking of Hinty . . . Danny."

It was not true, nevertheless she thrust it at him like a swift, goading retaliation. . . . Did he deserve it? She could not say. But contentedly she had set out that morning with her ideas about him all neatly sorted and docketed; while now he could mock that self-satisfaction with every careless grin he gave her. It was perhaps unreasoning, but, woman-like, she must resent it.

He was answering her.

"Good!" he commented brightly. "But why frown about him?"

Unwittingly he had added to that humiliation.

She gazed away from him, seeking to get a better grasp of herself. Perhaps her only trouble was that the midday sun had given her a headache. She must try not to be so absurdly petulant with him. But she had to utter it.

"You're an enigma!" she said. "Directly I get my mind made up about you, you alter it for me."

He laughed, settling himself more comfortably on

his back. He clasped his hands behind his head; lazily he drew up his knees.

“Do I? But it’s great here,” he teased. “I can lie here and imagine myself only an inch beneath the sky. The champagne, perhaps, but I haven’t felt so fit and contented in years.

“Oh, but I’m forgetting!” he continued with a chuckle. “I’m an enigma. I alter your mind for you. . . . Tell me how.”

Challenged thus, and with that unexpected belatedness of his reply giving such emphasis to his apparent unconcern, she was regretting her utterance. Embarrassed and angry with herself, she forced herself to a laugh. She would abandon that unequal struggle; she would wrestle with him no more.

“Sorry!” she retorted disarmingly. “But I’m trying to keep awake, and—well, in this heat, one subject’s as good as another, I suppose. . . . But you seem very cheerful today; almost a different person.”

“Why not? Life is good today.”

And then his grin sobered for a moment.

“I understand!” he rejoined. “I haven’t always laughed—have I? I haven’t always lain on my back and burred to the heavens as I’m doing now. Well, that was yesterday. Forget it! I was sick and sorry for myself, I guess. I’d come down from Chwan Hu convalescing from several years’ darned hard work—yes, and a bad dose of fever. If I’ve shown you a few skeletons in the cupboard, forgive me. It won’t happen again. The cupboard’s locked. Thank the Tsingtao

air, the idling, thank *you*! As you see me now, I'm remaining. Yes, I'm staying put!"

She looked at him. His gaze still held the leafy tree above them, indifferent to her, seemingly, even now. Yet she could only half believe him.

"Is that true?" she exclaimed. "I mean, are you really happy?"

He puffed at his cigarette.

"Cæsar has spoken," he answered. "As you see me now, I *am*! And I'm staying put. For the rest of my sick-leave here, I'm merely a loafing malingerer. . . . Congratulate me, Brutus!"

"I will!" she answered, and for the first time she could give him a smile that was spontaneous.

They lapsed into silence for a while. She sat listening to the tiny waterfall. The shade of the tree crept down the rocky hillside, banishing the darting lizards. It deepened. A bird took wing beneath the declining heat. She stretched her legs, feeling something of his own contentment.

Then, dreamily, he began to talk of Chwan Hu. Next year, with the funds which his headquarters had allotted to him, he would enlarge the mission's hospital, he said. If more teachers were forthcoming from England, he would extend the activities of the school.

"And if I've any time to spare, I'm going to amuse myself by cleaning the chapel organ. Imagine it if I can't put it together again!" he jested.

"Then you *are* going to be happy there?" she could

not resist asking. At which he gave her noisy, good-humoured retort:

“Good heavens, yes! Why not?”

Silence again! She picked up a slim volume of verse and began to read it. She put it down again. Yet no longer was she disconcerted. She wanted only to look at him, to study him anew. Yes, he was happy. She could now believe it.

And then, whisperingly, humbly almost, she put that sudden question to him:

“What is happiness?”

He did not answer for a moment. Perhaps he was asleep. But she saw at last the lazy movement of his arm. He sat up, and for the first time turned to her.

“Huh!” he breathed. “This is where I’m going to sound like a schoolgirl’s essay. Happiness? Well, it depends on what one *is* . . . how one’s made. For instance, consider the insect that’s just taken a bite at my ankle. If it hasn’t indigestion, I’ll say it’s happy!”

“What’s your own brand of happiness?” she persevered.

“It might not interest you,” he retorted laughingly. “Still here goes! I imagine it’s merely work, preoccupation—and a hundred per cent of those things.

“Yet it’s something more than that,” he added, and now he became grave. He looked into her eyes. “Work and preoccupation are not enough. In themselves they need not bring us any greater reward than bread and butter; sometimes even we can hate them. No, if we are to kill the inherent unhappiness that’s in all of us,



our work must be for the happiness of others, of *all*. We must see flowers growing where there were none before. . . . And now I *do* sound like the schoolgirl's essay!"

"No," she said. "Go on. And that is how you feel about yourself, your work at Chwan Hu?"

"I do," he assured her. "And forget all else I've said about it. I can consider myself avenged for the knocks I've had every time I save someone else from a knock. And think of the credit account I'm amassing. Up in Chwan Hu I can avenge myself a hundred times a day if I want to."

"And that's your happiness? Just that?"

"Just that! It's enough. . . . And you? What about yours?"

She did not answer. At which he chuckled.

"Well, I'm not going to preach!" he exclaimed. "Each of us finds happiness in his own way. Still, if one day I see you arriving at Chwan Hu with your luggage, I shall not be surprised."

"Chwan Hu!" . . . She had not expected that speech. She affected to be amused. "So you're still looking for that pretty little private secretary? Judging by your high spirits this morning, you'd found her, I'd been imagining."

He was unperturbed.

"I *shall* find her!" he retorted gaily. "Shanghai is full of private secretaries. And I'll make a point of getting the prettiest one I can see."

"But I wasn't thinking of it exactly like that," he

---

continued more gravely. "If you came, it wouldn't be for bread-and-butter, I fancy. Still, don't call it impossible."

She paled. She felt herself trembling.

"Why not?" she stammered.

"You'd come," he answered slowly, "only because of something in yourself . . . the wisdom in you, the loveliness. Yes, one of these days you'll start avenging Life's knocks too . . . giving . . . creating . . . not for one person, but hundreds . . . thousands . . . humanity itself.

"God, and how you could do it!" came then his passionate cry.

She could not speak; she could only look at him, dismayed, trembling still, yet acknowledging nevertheless the strange, thrilling flattery of that moment. Then, while she was groping for words, he banished it all. He was getting up, laughing, teasing her again.

"Come! Don't look so solemn about it. Let's go down to the car and make some tea."

He took her hands. Unresisting, she let him pull her to her feet.

"Yes, tea," she echoed mechanically.

"But why do you say all this?" she challenged him unhappily. "You're thinking of Danny again. I know it. . . . But I tell you, I can't! I can't leave him. It may be selfish, but I don't even want to."

Smilingly he was trying to calm her.

"Hush! Hush!" he uttered. "You don't have to."

He still gripped her hands. He drew them down

to her sides, holding them there. He was so near to her that she must feel his warm breath. His gaze became intimate with her neck, her white shoulders, the shadowed cleft of her heaving breasts.

"No, you don't have to," came his whispered echo. "Because you've put all your eggs into one basket, you don't necessarily have to drop and smash 'em. I don't suppose you will. I'm only saying that if he failed you, it wouldn't be your loss; it would be your gain. You'd go to greater happiness . . . wider . . . immense . . . the hundreds and thousands responding to you, blessing your name. They'd see you as I see you . . . lovely . . . perfect. They'd worship you."

Then, unexpectedly, and defeating her protest, he released her. That intensity in him was done. He laughed again. He was no more than a lean, sun-bronzed giant, demanding impatiently his tea.

"Come on!" he cried. "Last man's lousy."

"And first man's too quick for his bath!" she uttered, and laughed with him.

But she could remember those things—the fever in his voice, his burning, passionate gaze. He had almost kissed her, surely. She readjusted her slipping shoulder-straps.

## XXVI

Their tea was finished. It was almost five o'clock. She began to murmur of returning to Tsingtao.

"No great hurry," she added politely. "But Danny

doesn't trust this car too much. It ought to be overhauled."

He was lighting a cigarette.

"Don't worry," he answered. "We could almost roll home. It's downhill practically all the way. And your chauffeur looks competent. . . . Let's have a peep at that temple we were planning to see. It's only a couple of *li* farther on."

She demurred. Yet she reminded herself—it was her last day with him. And the chauffeur, who had overheard her anxiety about the car's condition, was now volubly reassuring her.

"Very well," she jested. "But if you two men don't get me home by nightfall, I'm a ruined woman."

They explored the temple, chatting over its peculiarities with its guardian priest. The sun began to slant, bringing cool mysterious dignity to its tree-held courtyard. Forgetting her desire to return, she let the priest burn joss-sticks for her, and watched him while, taking up a pair of strikers, he sat before a huge bell, flogging it into great booming resonance. And John Granger Lee's voice was ever echoing in the gloom . . . mocking, scathing, very subtly soothing her with its remote flattery.

"Yes, fascinating!" he echoed. "But it's no longer China, no longer the people. The temples are decaying, the gods are only museum pieces; China is too busy exploring the new civilization we've shown it. Yes, no more the old gods; just the guns!

"But they'll be saved," she heard his tense whisper.



"Something better than science or politics . . . hearts . . . thoughts . . . example. The man who ran from a genuine smile is not yet born.

One might not necessarily believe it, but it could exalt him momentarily; lift him beyond her doubt. The shadows lengthened.

## XXVII

When at last they left there, it was almost dusk. The chauffeur, sitting at the wheel of the car, was testing its headlights. The countryside that had looked so intimate during the blazing sun-drenched day now seemed aloof and apart from them. Shapes faded and were lost; the sunset fled from the mountain-tops, and left them grey, jagged, threatening. Instinctively as she entered the car, she groped under its seat for a rug.

They were riding on, the chauffeur alert and cautious at every bend of the narrow, winding road. Tree-trunks looming white and surprised in the glare of the headlights gave black cavernous quality to the deepening gloom beyond them.

"He's a smart driver," she heard Lee's voice, but it did not reassure her. Absurdly now her mood was guilty and afraid. Before she could smile again, she must see the lights of Tsingtao.

"It's cold up here," she retorted. She drew the rug closer about her knees.

And then, while they were negotiating one of the

many difficult turns to be encountered on the road, her unreasoning fears were brought to fever pitch. The car had halted.

The chauffeur turned for a moment and looked at them. His grin spoke reassurance. He pressed the self-starter; gaining no response from it but undismayed, he bent to examine the petrol-gauge.

"Petrol good! No worry!" he explained. Grinning still, he slipped from his seat and went to lift the bonnet.

"Perhaps carburettor," he shouted to them. "Soon fix!"

"That sounds more like it," came Lee's comment to Jennie. "I'll go and help him. It's only a ten minutes' job."

But he had to stay and subdue her fierce doubt.

"You're sure?" she demanded.

"Why, of course. Either it's carburettor trouble or something's worked loose. Don't worry! We've a whole evening. Hinty's boat isn't due in until eleven."

"But . . . *Nadya!*" she protested, and an icy fear was on her.

She recovered herself, however; answering his surprised inquiry.

"Who's *Nadya?*" she echoed. "Oh, no one! Just the number-one hostess at the cabaret. But I left a note for her. She's expecting me back to dinner. She'll be worried about me. . . . These roads, I mean. This place! . . . Yes, go and help him. Hurry!"

He went, whistling loudly for her benefit. Because

of her thin dress and the rapidly falling temperature, she shut the door behind him. But also it shut her out from what was happening. She grew frightened again.

After ten minutes, he returned for a moment.

"Can't see anything alarming," he informed her. "So it's sure to be the carburettor. But it's slow work. The fool doesn't carry an electric torch."

He disappeared once more. Momentarily she was relieved. But—Nadya! She ought to have waited for Nadya, talked to her about him . . . laughed . . . made it seem trivial and ridiculous. And the minutes flying by! There would hardly be time to change, to compose herself. But again Nadya! Nadya's thoughts about her. . . . "Leaving everything to the last, imperilling his happiness."

In her anger she leaned over to the wheel, making fierce summons to Lee with the electric horn.

He returned, grinning ruefully.

"Sorry! I know how you feel!" he exclaimed. "Still, he's doing his best.

"But I think I ought to tell you," he added. "It's not the carburettor. I fancy we're ditched. We shall have to get another car from Tsingtao . . . but how?"

He grinned again.

"I guess you hate me," came his contrition. "Yes, it was my fault . . . fooling about at that temple when we might have been half-way home.

"But look here!" he tried to console her. "The chief thing is to see that Hinty has some sort of explanation. Even if we can't get another car in time,

perhaps we can get a message through to the cabaret . . . ask someone to meet him and explain.”

“And how do we do it?” she challenged him. “This is China . . . the mountains . . . the nearest telephone is probably a dozen miles away.”

She called the chauffeur. He, answering with that evasive volubility which the Oriental must ever employ to cover his loss of “face”, was at last prevailed upon to confirm her doubt. The nearest telephone was at a German sanatorium eighteen miles away, he admitted.

“Very well. You’ll have to go to Laushan,” Lee was now telling him. “Yes, walk!”

But he saw that sudden look of terror on the chauffeur’s face. He retracted that speech.

“No,” he murmured to Jennie. “He’d never do it. He’s a townsman, afraid of the dark and the devils. He’d sooner let me kill him! . . . I’ll go myself. I’ll make for that sanatorium. Perhaps they’ll lend me a car.”

She looked at her watch. . . . Eighteen miles! And on the dark mountain roads! By the time that Lee had reached the sanatorium Hinty would have long since returned. But a telephone message would at least reassure him.

“Do you think you could find your way?” she asked.

He laughed.

“I don’t know, but I’ll have a darned good try. Provided I can stumble on an occasional village and make sense of the local brand of Chinese it ought to be fairly easy.”

But now she shook her head. Eighteen miles—she



could not ask him. And there was all the suspense of the weary hours intervening.

"It's too far," she said. "It would be breakfast-time before you got there."

"Nonsense!" he lied cheerfully. "A steady three miles an hour should get me there by four at the latest."

He could not convince her, however.

"No," she decided. "We'll stay here till daybreak. Perhaps then you'll be able to see what's the matter with this thing, and repair it on the spot."

"Very well. But I'm not giving up," he countered. "I'm getting back to that engine. I'll keep this fellow busy a while. With an ounce of luck we'll be on our way yet."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"There's no such thing as an ounce of luck," she retorted dully. "Luck's either right with you or all against you. . . . Oh, well!"

## XXVIII

They had long since ceased to talk. They sat in opposite corners of the car, while the diminutive chauffeur lay stretched on the seats before them. He snored.

Eventually she fancied that Lee slept, too. She could not resent it, or any longer be angry with him. He and the Chinese had laboured over the car for nearly three hours. And she could still muse upon his last utterance to her. "The dawn will wake us. Try to sleep," he had said, and tucking the car's only

rug more warmly about her, had moved away to his own corner. Just that, not even the touch of his hand on her own. She must respect him for it.

Yet did it matter any longer? Three-thirty! Hinty! Nadya there! The minutes gnawing at their faith, one by one.

Day broke at last—a swift, red dawn that set the outcrops of the scarred mountains glowing angrily—at which, springing from sleep, Lee roused the chauffeur almost rudely. But she restrained him.

“It doesn’t matter,” she uttered. “He’ll be hungry. Perhaps there are some sandwiches in that hamper.”

“He’ll eat when we’ve got this car going,” he retorted. “Why didn’t the fool bring a torch?”

She would not argue with him. Slowly she took from the hamper a tea-kettle and went in search of water. She found a stream at last, rippling over a pebbly bed. She filled the kettle. She bathed her face and hands. But she did not hurry back. She leaned against a rock, gazing down to the misty valleys where the darkness still lingered. She hoped that Hinty slept. But no! Better that he was setting out fiercely in search of her. Better his doubt of her than his resignation.

When she returned she saw Lee and the Chinese standing idly.

“It’s the distributor—a garage job!” Lee announced tragically. “Nothing for it now except to find a telephone and get help.

“But perhaps it’s coming.” He tried to reassure

her. "Hinty will be hiring a car and looking for us, I fancy."

"What makes you think so?"

He stared at her for a moment. Her casual manner puzzled him.

"Well, ask yourself!" he retorted. "If I know Hinty correctly he'll be mobilizing the whole Tsingtao police force as well.

"Yes, and with a very special gun in his hand for John Granger Lee!" he concluded with mock distress.

But she surprised him again.

"I wonder!" was all she said, and, shrugging her shoulders strangely, turned away from him.

There was some food remaining in the hamper from their yesterday's tiffin. But they did not eat it. They presented it to the Chinese, yet advising him to save it for his midday meal. Then, over cups of milkless tea, they discussed their plans, Lee reverting to his opinion that Hinty would look for them, perhaps bringing a search-party.

"Nevertheless," he added, "we're somewhat off the beaten track here. We ought to make for Laushan, where he's more likely to look for us. If he hasn't found us by then, we can 'phone him."

She agreed. But the chauffeur might better remain with the car, she said, until at Laushan they could telephone Hinty and let him send a breakdown lorry to it. Moreover, if they and the chauffeur separated, it would double their chances of getting into touch with Hinty. The chauffeur's plight might attract the

notice of a passing military service-wagon, for instance, or some adventurous motor-tourist returning from the interior.

Having told him what to do in such a contingency and assured herself that he knew where to find drinking-water, Jennie gave him some money and they set out on their eighteen miles' journey.

“But take it quietly,” Lee warned her as he glanced at her flimsy shoes. “These are tough roads, and a ‘busted’ ankle would just about ruin us.”

They tramped on, the cool morning air of the mountains invigorating them; but, as the day advanced, they had perforce to go more slowly. The sun blazed down; the heat rose up from the hard, stony road; at every stream or spring they must halt to bathe their feet.

When they had covered about seven miles, they rejoiced to find a tiny village. The peasants fed them and refreshed them with tea, but when Lee inquired the possibility of getting a conveyance to Laushan, their simple hosts disappointed them. Apologetically they offered them more tea, they gave them two stout sticks to aid their feet. But a conveyance! The richest man of them possessed only a wheelbarrow.

They trudged on, some little naked children accompanying them for a while. Which tempted Jennie's smile at Lee's boisterous jests about them.

“Put your hat on; you'll get sunstroke!” he cried in English to the eldest of them.

But the children eventually left them. Lee fell



silent. If they talked again, they could only talk of Hinty, it seemed.

Then at noon, and with only a few more miles of that journey accomplished, the temperature began swiftly to drop; there was a sudden breeze at their backs. Remembering the fiery sunrise, Jennie looked behind her and saw the mountains black with storm. There came the distant roll of thunder.

"Well," Lee exclaimed, as he screwed up his eyes against the newly swirling dust, "a break in the heat won't come amiss. These mountain storms rarely last long, fortunately."

The first raindrop flopped to the dust like a huge coin. A few seconds more, and the tropical cloudburst had overtaken them. Almost in an instant they were wet to the skin.

He took her arm as he saw her wince beneath the terrifying lightning.

"What do we do?" he asked cheerfully. "Do we take shelter, or do we press on dutifully to the—er—court of inquiry?"

"Just as you like," she answered. But suddenly she turned to him angrily.

"If you *must* talk of Danny, why make me sound like a guilty schoolgirl?" she demanded. "I lived before I met him; I'll live again. . . ."

But she checked herself. She was betraying her own absurd reasoning.

"I'm sorry," she said contritely. "I'm behaving and thinking like a little fool. Let's find shelter. . . ."

But, please! We're not worrying about Danny. He doesn't think that way about me—or about you, for that matter. And if there's any explanation owing to him, it's my responsibility, not yours.

“But I don't have to explain,” she added, and for an instant her eyes held challenge again.

He made no comment on that speech. He looked down at himself, grinning at the way his thin, wet trousers clung comically to his legs.

“I think I see a temple . . . up on that hill in those trees,” he exclaimed. “Rather a stiff climb, but it might be worth it.”

They left the road and began that ascent, she slipping or stumbling frequently, yet with ever his strong arm to help her. Reaching the temple they proclaimed their disappointment, however. There was no priest to welcome them. It was deserted and neglected, its inner walls defaced with anti-Japanese obscenities with which a passing band of soldiers had amused themselves. It stank foully of the bats which infested its roof. Moreover it consisted only of a long single chamber whose front was open to the weather. But behind a pedestalled row of painted gods there would be shelter at least from the driving rain. They went there and looked about them. In a corner lay some dry brushwood, brought there probably by a wanderer who had used the place for a night's refuge. There was also the circular pile of ashes where the wanderer had made his fire, a number of half-burned lengths of tree-branches protruding from it.

Lee was delightedly grinning at this discovery.

"I think so!" he exclaimed cryptically. "But how are we going to do it? There's no paper, and I guess my matches are ruined."

She opened her bag, exploring its contents. There was a petrol-lighter, which might have gone dry; there was a long letter from her father, a few receipts, and bills. There was also one of Hinty's photographs.

"Help yourself!" she now encouraged him. "If the worst comes to the worst, the photograph will have to go too!"

He returned it to her, however.

"Hinty's too tough!" he teased her. Kneeling down, he expertly crumpled the papers, covering them lightly with the brushwood. Then he took up the petrol-lighter, shaking it vigorously.

"Hope hard!" he begged her laughingly. At his seventh attempt, he produced a flame. In a few minutes he stood grinning at her across a cheerful fire.

"If we had a kettle of water we'd have something to drink; that's if we had some tea," he jested.

But he looked at her suddenly. Beneath her wet clothes she was shivering.

He went out to the temple's broken steps for a moment, seeking to scan the sky. The tall surrounding trees defeated him, however, but the fury of the storm seemed unabated. He returned, shaking his head.

"We may be here for some time," he began, "and

this fire won't last too long. Still, there ought to be a fair amount of wood under those trees that the rain hasn't yet touched. I'll go out and look for it before it's too late.

“But look here!” he added. “If you're not careful you'll be getting a fever. Why not take off your clothes and dry 'em? I'll be gone for some time, and—well, these Chinese gods have their backs turned, you'll notice.”

She demurred. He was as miserable and shivering as herself, surely. But he insisted. “I'll be gone some time,” he repeated. Singing loudly, he went.

She stirred the fire, giving it the few last sticks that remained. Musingly she slipped off her simple garments and spread them out on the floor. Her dress would surely never dry, but at least she could attempt to make her underclothing more comfortable. She knelt down on the hard floor, holding her knickers to the blaze; her breast bent gratefully to its warmth.

She heard him returning, his heavy shoes clattering upon the flagstones. At which she cried out a little unhappily, for he had been gone only a few minutes. “Don't come in!” she begged. But he quickly reassured her.

“I haven't that much courage,” he sang out. “But here's something to be getting on with. I'll be back with more.”

Through a space between two of the gods she saw him go. He did not look back. She went to the heap of brushwood which he had brought and she carried



it to the fire. He had brought too some dead branches which now she ranged one above the other on one side of the fire like a clothes-horse. She spread out her dress on them. When he returned it would make some sort of screen for her.

He did not come for more than ten minutes, however. She saw him lurching up the steps, his arms outstretched beneath a huge load of timber which he had first broken into roughly equal lengths. His face was hidden, but she saw his streaming hair. As he halted on a dry flagstone, the water ran from his clothes and made a wide pool.

He was dropping his burden.

"Well, if only we can dry 'em off, we've enough stuff to keep us going for hours," he proclaimed triumphantly. "But gosh, I'm wet! How long will you be?"

"I don't know," she answered. "This fire isn't very hot yet. I haven't even the tiniest piece that's dry. . . . But bring that wood in. I'm hiding behind my home-made clothes-horse."

Hesitatingly, he obeyed her. As she knelt behind her improvised screen, he could see only her head and shoulders.

"Humble pardon, *sir*," he exclaimed, and he gave to that unusual address his relieved, laughing emphasis. Then, as though he feared her dislike of that jest, he fell silent. He began to arrange the hissing wood across the fire.

Her voice made him look up at last.

“You’re shivering,” she said. “Why don’t you try and dry yourself?”

He made an unsteady laugh.

“I’d thought of looking for more wood,” he answered. But he nodded. Slowly he went from her, his shoes squelching water as he moved. A few moments later she heard him wringing out his clothes.

Eventually he returned, hugging under his left arm a damp bundle. Ludicrously draped before him like an apron was his jacket, his necktie supporting it precariously.

“Great!” he exclaimed. “Thanks very much.

“But won’t you be cold there?” he added unhappily. “Look here, I’ll wait a little while.”

Reassured by his manner, she hesitated. “What’s a body, anyway?” came her swift inward mockery of herself. “I can always hate him, if necessary.”

“Don’t be a fool!” she now retorted. “Better a couple of sensible, undressed people than two shrouded corpses.”

At which she stepped suddenly into the fire’s leaping glow and confronted him with her nakedness.

“Yes, it’s cold . . . darned cold,” she said. “And for heaven’s sake stop arguing. Dry yourself. Try and dry some cigarettes too.”

Then, with her back half-turned to him, she knelt down to rearrange her steaming *lingerie*.

“Great! Thanks very much,” he said again, but no other word. He took off his shoes.

The fire blazed on, so fiercely now that they must

shrink a little from its heat. Its restless, impulsive glow made fierce, darting assault on the temple's age-held gloom, mocking the expressionless backs of the idols, thrusting long, inquisitive fingers to the brooding, crumbling roof. It claimed the man and woman too, giving barbaric strangeness to their bodies with its unfamiliar tricks of light and shade . . . her breasts and thighs ruddy; her throat and belly lost in mysterious dusk. Yet they themselves saw nothing of that scene. They saw only their steaming clothes. Picking up a drying cigarette, he straightened it between his fingers and offered it to her.

"Yes, as I was saying," he continued, "the only time I saw Irving on the stage was a month before he died."

But they fell silent at last. That difficult detachment could not be maintained. He watched her as she bent and picked up her brassière. "It's done to a nicety!" she jested, but his mind could hold thought only for the contour of her shoulders leaping suddenly into the glow.

"God!" he breathed from the depths of his musings. "If only I weren't John Granger Lee. . . . Yes, tied like a goat to a post!"

She tried to make her comment sound natural.

"Your wife, you mean?"

But she had to turn and look for his answer.

"You're the loveliest thing I've seen!" came his cry.

She did not reprove him. He heard only her gently soothing plea.

“Don’t! A woman’s not worth all that. Truly she isn’t. . . . For John Granger Lee there’s something happier, I fancy.

“Which reminds me,” she added cheerfully. “You were going to tell me more about Chwan Hu.”

At which he subsided.

“Chwan Hu!” he echoed. “Er—thanks! Yes, thanks very much.”

She bent down again, gathering together the remainder of her underclothing. Giving him a careless smile, she got to her feet and, retiring to a corner, began to dress. But she had to return to him eventually, waiting now for her shoes and dress to dry. With her hand pressed against one of the idols, she stood there, lifting a foot to the blaze.

“Yes, I’m a little too young to remember Irving,” she resumed. “But I’m hungry! Think of a menu.”

“Scotch broth,” he began.

“Hot lobster,” she laughingly added.

“And Maryland chicken. . . .”

“. . . With *petits pois frais* to crown it.”

“Sure!” he rejoined. “But we’re not heavy enough. Start again. Mulligatawny soup. Crayfish in hot wine. Roast pork with . . .”

And then his impassioned cry.

“God, if Hinty makes you unhappy over this, I’ll want to kill him.”

But he restrained himself again. He reached across the fire for his trunks and trousers.

“Sorry!” he exclaimed. “We hadn’t finished. . . .



Roast pork with sage-and-onion seasoning, parsnips, brussels sprouts. Apple fritters to follow."

At which he leapt lightly into the shadows, swiftly covering himself. Then, as he marched back to her, looking for his shirt, he smiled; he faced her, gripping her soft arms.

"Yes, I've learned it," he uttered strangely. "This has taught me something. You don't fear me; you don't fear any man. I think I understand Hinty at last . . . the way he's content . . . worshipping you. He's seen what you are. Yes, I understand—everything! You're pure . . . immaculate. . . ."

"Don't, don't!" she was begging him. She tried to break from him. "I'm not like that. You mustn't think of it. I'm only a woman . . . ordinary . . . foolish."

Yet his hands still gripped her. The fevered torrent of his words rushed on. Did he speak madness, or merely a vast hypocrisy? She could not say. But she must thrill beneath it, notwithstanding. . . .

"Chwan Hu! The hundreds and thousands blessing you, worshipping you. . . . Jennie! My virgin goddess. . . . *Saving us!*"

And then they started, suddenly recoiling from each other. They were no longer alone.

## XXIX

Above the roar of the storm they had heard a staccato clattering. Now, as they stared inquiringly from behind the row of effigies, they saw two men both of

them Chinese, mounting the temple's uneven steps. Each led an unkempt, sweating pony. The men advanced cautiously, the foremost of them clumsily holding a revolver at arm's length before him and uttering a noisy challenge.

“Come out!” he cried in the local dialect.

Lee, answering in the cultured Mandarin speech, surprised him with his ringing English voice.

“What do you want?” he demanded. “There is no priest here. We are foreigners.”

Then, more sharply, he added that brusque order.

“Hitch your ponies. Put away your revolver. Come here and make your kow-tow to us . . . a grand kow-tow!”

There came no answer; one heard only the inaudible murmur with which, probably, they discussed that unexpected resistance. Lee picked up one of the stout staves which the villagers had given them. . . . “Yes,” he answered Jennie's inquiring murmur. “They're dangerous, I fancy. But look! They're tying up their ponies. Perhaps I've impressed them.”

The Chinese were now silently coming into the glow of the fire, giving Jennie's scantily clad form their puzzled glances. One wore the faded blue dress of a peasant; the other, who still held his revolver before him, was clad, save for his muddy cloth shoes, in a greasy military uniform. Both had the desperate fugitive air of the typical native “bad man.”

“Well, make your kow-tow,” Lee was reminding them curtly.

The man in the uniform obeyed, but he leered at

them nevertheless, moving nearer to the fire to make a closer study of Jennie.

"We want tea. We do not see tea. Therefore give us money," he exclaimed.

"Much money!" he added, with a threatening flourish of his weapon.

Observing Jennie's distress, Lee did not translate that demand too accurately.

"Probably a couple of deserters from the army," he murmured. "But don't look too scared. All they want is a couple of dollars to see them on their way, apparently."

"Well, they'd better have 'em," he decided. At which, fishing in the pockets of his trousers, he produced a handful of silver, grinningly tossing it in his palm for a moment and then flinging it to the floor.

"*Hao!*" he cried. "It is yours!"

But no sooner did the bandits come scrambling forward to pick up the rolling pieces than he dealt the man with the revolver a blow on the jaw that knocked him senseless. Rushing then at the other man, he twisted his arm behind his back until he screamed out in agony. Then, throwing him down on his prostrate companion, he bent and picked up the revolver.

"Just a simple, peaceful missionary!" he murmured with a grin. "But wait! No need to get alarmed, Jennie. These fellows may be useful."

He examined the revolver for a moment, breaking it and discovering that it was loaded. Then, as the two men were getting unhappily to their knees, he laughed.

“Stay there! Kow-tow again,” he commanded. And then, pocketing the revolver, he surprised them. He drew from his pocket a roll of five-dollar bills, dropping two of them at his feet.

“Here is more money,” he exclaimed. “Enough to keep you in rice until a dog barks at you and you die of fright. Pick it up. Pick it up, I said. And now listen to me.”

At which he began swiftly to question them. . . . Were their over-ridden ponies fit enough for an eight-miles’ ride? Did they know the road to Laushan? Could they be trusted to bear an important message to the white masters residing there? If they could answer yes to these things, there was even more money for them; also the return of their precious revolver.

Then, while he translated these questions to Jennie, the men had talked between themselves and were answering him. They feared the white masters of Laushan, they began shrewdly; but, if he, the strongest white master of them all, would give them but ten more dollars they would risk their safety in his service.

He grinned.

“Ten more dollars only if you bring the white masters of Laushan back here with you,” was his final retort to them.

“Yes, just a simple missionary!” he exclaimed again when he had heard their acquiescing murmurs. “And now, Jennie, this is where I shall have to rob you of Hinty’s photograph after all. Sorry, but it’s for Hinty himself. I’m asking someone at Laushan to ’phone him



and relieve his mind, also to get us out of here with a car. If you haven't a pencil, lend me a nail-file . . . a hair-pin . . . anything!"

The pencil which she offered him was blunt, the photograph small. But at last, on the back of it, he had written a fairly legible message.

"Put it in your pocket," he ordered the man in the military uniform. "Keep it dry. Guard it with your life. For here is the face of the only man who can make the Great and Celestial White Goddess smile down on him. . . . And now hurry! Ten more dollars and your revolver when you come back.

"And the thanks of that simple missionary," he had to add in English.

She looked at him, listening to the shouts of the departing men as they guided their ponies down the steep, treacherous path. Her shining eyes were level with his bare, sun-bronzed shoulders.

"I believe you're conceited," she commented. "Still, I'm beginning to like my missionaries that way. Thanks very much.

"But missionaries of that sort don't fall for celestial white goddesses," she could not resist reproving him.

### XXX

Ironically, they saw help coming to them just when the storm had ceased abruptly, and the rain-sodden countryside lay golden beneath the rays of a declining sun.

Their rescuers were a middle-aged and preoccupied-looking German who introduced himself as a physician and his two attendant and muscular Chinese “boys.” The bandits were not with them.

“Where are they?”—the German physician answered Lee’s questions. “I do not know. I did not see them; my colleague did see them. But ‘more money for them,’ you say!” He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. “I know what my colleague would say to them. ‘Money! I give you my foot!’ Yes, he did send them away.”

But the German was a man of few words. He was more concerned with feeling Jennie’s pulse and threatening that when she reached Laushan he would give her quinine. Moreover, when he learned that he had still to rescue Hinty’s chauffeur, he was even less inclined for speech.

“Please, I am a busy man,” he apologized. “We must hurry.”

They found the chauffeur sitting at his wheel—as expressionless and unconcerned apparently as when they had last seen him. He had feared the coming of the dark, but he had not been unhappy, he assured them. He had consoled himself by cursing the rain “on its uncle’s side,” also by laughing at the discomfiture of his wife’s seventeen idle relatives whom he supported and who probably imagined him dead.

“I belong die-die, they catch own chow!” he explained succinctly.

During that return journey, the German doctor was

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even more uncommunicative. He must watch the dangerous road, which in many places the torrential rain had almost washed away. Probably too, he feared for his overloaded car. When Jennie ventured to ask what had been Hinty's response to the telephone message, he answered almost curtly.

"I do not know, madam. Only did my colleague tell of two people at the temple and ask me to bring them."

Jennie appropriately soothed him. "We're very, very grateful to you, Doctor." Then she turned and grinned at her companion.

"Anyhow, he's got our message," she whispered. "By the time we see him again, he'll have emerged from the spot of floor-tramping and thoroughly forgiven us."

Because of that lack of privacy, they did not continue the subject, however. They teased Hinty's chauffeur about his wife's seventeen relatives. But Jenny's mood spoke her returning happiness.

"Dannie"—she was rehearsing inwardly, and she would tell him everything—"you don't have to worry about him. He's a man . . . decent, clean . . . a man like yourself! People are wrong about him."

And then, more importantly:

"Dannie, when that darned old Japanese steamer blew its siren, I was trying to tell you something."

Yes, the few short hours; his calm, patient smile as he listened to her.

They reached Laushan. Their rescuer gave them each a stiff dose of quinine. Then, consigning them to

the care of another and older German, he clicked his heels and made hurried farewell. . . . “Thank you, no trouble, but I work! Good-bye!”

The German who was now called upon to entertain them was the man who had interviewed the bandits, they learned. He was good-humoured and friendly, but, like his colleague, he was more concerned with the essentials of hospitality than with any desire for idle gossip.

“Yes, yes; they were amusing,” he agreed. “But, please, you must first take a bath. Then, you are English; so you will like cocktails, please. Then, you will dine with me. After that? Well, you should sleep; I could give you beds.”

“Ah, but I see! Madam is anxious,” he added sagely. “Well, in case you could not honour me, I ordered my car. For ten o’clock, I said. I will myself take you to Tsingtao.”

Lee exchanged glances with Jennie.

“Isn’t that keeping you out of bed rather late, sir?” he asked tactfully.

But the German chuckled.

“No, no!” he assured them. “I do not go to Tsingtao often, and—well, even a doctor must sometimes make play. My friends, you give me good excuse.”

At which he permitted himself a genial impatience.

“Come please! You have had much rain and little food. I do not want you to be sick. Quick! Your baths.”

Against that solid Teuton determination they could



not argue. Moreover, if Hinty had received their message, what would a few more hours matter? They thanked their host and let him hustle them from the room.

### XXXI

When at last the German was ushering them into his car, it was late—nearly twelve. But so generous and entertaining was his hospitality that Jennie had hardly noticed the time passing. She answered his apology with a carefree laugh.

“What does it matter?” she retorted. “I’ve enjoyed it thoroughly. And—well, *Hinty’s* is open all night.”

As he drove, the German questioned Lee occasionally about Chwan Hu. He had been there also, he said, and knew the upper Yangtse river well.

“But you return to a strange place, Mr. Lee,” he commented. “A cruel place. I admire your courage. The upper river is not liked.

“And yet,” he added musingly, “I feel often that I shall go there again. Yes, that is the strangest thing of this China. The more it is cruel and one runs from it, the more it says ‘come back’!

“Ah, but the upper river!” he exclaimed over his shoulder to Jennie. “When I think of it I am cold. You do not go there, Miss Davidson?”

“No, I stay in Tsingtao,” she answered. “At least, I hope so.”

Yet she must remember Lee sitting beside her. . . . His last evening with her, probably!

“Still, I don’t think I’d fear it,” she added quickly. When inevitably he turned to look at her, she gave him her broad grin.

But it was a dangerous topic, nevertheless. All that evening she had been discreetly studying him. The anxieties of the past twenty-four hours had begun to tell on him, she fancied. He was paler, quieter; and sometimes during dinner he had been ill-at-ease even to the extreme of fidgetiness. Obviously he was still very far from being as physically recovered as he had professed to be.

She decided to get the German away from the subject of Chwan Hu.

“You must have thought our message to you rather unusual, Doctor,” she exclaimed.

“Well, yes,” he agreed. “I am surprised that it reached me. For these men are bandits, I think. It is strange that they did not rob you.”

She laughed.

“I must thank Mr. Lee for that,” she answered. “He’s the least lamb-like missionary I’ve ever met. . . . But the photograph, I mean. It was the only piece of paper we didn’t burn when we made ourselves a fire.”

“The photograph?” The German was negotiating a dangerous bend of the road. “Excuse me, but I did not hear properly.”

“The photograph on which I wrote that message to you,” Lee explained.

“A message? I did not receive a message.”

"You did not? But—well, look here, Doctor! If you didn't receive my message, how did you know anything about us?"

"Well, how do you think, my friend?"

And then, sensing their sudden disquiet, the German brought the car to a halt. Switching on the light, he turned to look at them.

Already, however, was Jennie unhappily informing him.

"We asked you in that message to 'phone Mr. Hinty, the owner of the place you're taking us to. We knew he'd be worried about us. We wanted to——"

She broke off, staring speechlessly at Lee.

The other man, seeing the grave look which they exchanged, made musing comment.

"I am sorry," he murmured. "I can see that I have made some mistake."

He paused, recalling that happening.

"They were brought to me by my *t'ing ch'ai*. The *t'ing ch'ai* told me what already they had said to him . . . there were two people in trouble at the temple. I did not need to hear more. I gave them a dollar. I went to tell my colleague to find you. I left the men to my *t'ing ch'ai*. He told me afterwards that they tried to make some trouble about money. But, of course, he threw them out.

"Yes, yes; I can see now that I was too quick," he added apologetically. "But a photograph, a message from you? I was busy; I saw these men only for a few seconds."

He started the car, yet he must muse again on her restless, troubled eyes.

“Is it a very serious matter?” he asked gently.

“Well, let’s say that Hinty’s probably looking for me with a gun in his hand,” came Lee’s forced jesting.

But desperately Jennie had recovered herself.

“No, no, Doctor! Please don’t worry about it,” she begged. “Mr. Hinty will be only too glad to see the chauffeur and ourselves safe and sound. . . . Look! There are the lights of Tsingtao already!”

Yet before they had gone far, there must come the voice of her perplexed brooding:

“No one’s been inquiring about us at Laushan, you say?”

## XXXII

When they had reached *Hinty’s*, she offered the kindly doctor its hospitality. But tactfully he declined it. He left them, murmuring roguishly of a prior appointment with a lady in the Russian quarter who had promised him a breakfast of German beer and sausage. At which, she dismissed Hinty’s chauffeur and turned to Lee.

“Well, get some sleep,” she advised him. “I’ll give you all the news over the ’phone tomorrow.”

But he shook his head.

“I must show the lad an honest face,” he insisted.

With her heart pounding, she mounted the stairs, Lee’s noisy jests following her as she went. They



reached the entrance to the cabaret; there came a familiar hubbub from the bar, a burst of applause from the dance-room.

"Big-a ship he come!" the doorman informed her. "Plenty people!"

His friendly grin was reassuring. But where was Hinty? she asked him.

"Master go top-side," he answered.

She glanced at her watch. It would not be unusual for Hinty to have retired to the apartment at that hour. Lately, indeed, he had often retired as early as 1.30, leaving the affairs of the cabaret to Nadya Skolnikova and the *shroff*.

"Nothing seems to have altered. The old village is still the same," she heard Lee's relieved jest.

"Nothing at all," she agreed, with a lightness she was far from feeling. . . . "Considering how many centuries I've been away, it's almost unflattering."

She paused at an open door, her eyes searching the crowded dance-room for a glimpse of Nadya. Not seeing her, she shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, come on," she laughed; "let's get it over!"

Taking a key out of her bag, she led the way to the apartment.

The apartment was in darkness, which set her jesting again.

"Not only unflattering, but almost insulting. . . . The man's asleep!"

"Still, we ought to tell him, I think!" she added

more soberly. “*Number One!*” she called loudly to the sleeping head-boy, and switched on a light.

The Chinese was at last drowsily coming to her, also her own *amah*. But, before she could ask them to rouse their master, the door of Hinty’s bedroom had opened. There, dragging one of Hinty’s own dressing-gowns over her breast, stood Nadya Skolnikova.

“Well, why not say something?” She answered Jennie’s speechless gaze. “I’ve been listening for it—sure, for two whole nights! As for your boy friend here—well, thinking of his love-lit eyes, I haven’t slept a wink.”

Then, as though unnerved by their strange, incredulous silence, she let her voice rise almost to a scream.

“Why don’t you say something?” she reiterated frenziedly. “I tell you, it’s happened—happened! God, why shouldn’t it happen?”

At last was Jennie desperately answering her.

“Where is Hinty?” came her grim challenge.

“He’s in here!”

“He isn’t! I don’t believe it. But you know all about him. Tell me, and don’t waste my time. . . . Where is he?”

“Yes, and tell me why he didn’t come looking for me,” came her fierce whisper.

“Why should I tell you?”

Nadya’s face was death-like in its pallor.

And then suddenly she laughed. She flung the bedroom door wide open, revealing the disordered room.

"This will tell you!" came her shrill mockery. "Have a good look at him. Drunk since tiffin yesterday. So darned drunk that you've never existed. . . . And now let me get your ladyship a rickshaw!"

## XXXIII

Lee's voice was rising unhappily.

"I think you'd better come," he said. "I'll try and get a room for you at the hotel."

He turned then to the Russian girl.

"This isn't the last you've heard of us," he threatened. "Tomorrow, Hinty will have to hear *our* side of the story, and whether he likes it or not.

"But why tomorrow?" he questioned himself fiercely.

"He'll hear me now."

"Sure, try and wake him!" Nadya flung at him.

"Yes, Jennie Davidson," came then her mocking sibilance; "it's just that sort of forgetfulness . . . as many drinks as it will take you years to get him back."

Jennie cut his angry remonstrance short.

"Don't!" she cried. "It wouldn't help. You'd better go. And I'm not coming with you. I'm staying here. . . . Yes, please go."

At which she confronted Nadya anew.

"Tell me why he didn't come looking for me!" she demanded again.

Nadya hesitated, staring at Jennie, searching her eyes; her defiance softening momentarily beneath her doubt.

“You’re telling me there’s nothing between yourself and this man?” she uttered incredulously.

But she would not wait to hear that answer. She was whipping herself into frenzy again.

“Why didn’t he go looking for you?” she echoed. “I’ll tell you. . . . He didn’t because he was the poor white-livered louse you’ve made of him. No, it was undignified, indelicate, it just *wasn’t done!* Restraint, gentlemanly forbearance, and all the other horsefeathers. So he stayed here, nursing it, holding it. If you could have seen the hell in his eyes it would burn in you all your days. . . . And the rest? Well, once I warned you! I liked you, I said, but I loved him too. And there was a breaking-point somewhere.”

“You told him?”—Jennie’s tense whisper.

Nadya stared at her again—large-eyed, wondering. Her anger subsided. Her voice came almost calmly.

“I’m sorry,” she murmured. “But, yes! I told him. You had it coming! You forced me . . . *his* misery, mine. How could I let him die by—by inches?”

At last Jennie nodded. Strangely, while the missionary stood mute and uncomprehending, she touched the other girl’s hand.

“Don’t!” she whispered. “Don’t! I understand. But you told him!” She shrugged her shoulders, noisily she laughed. “Well, there’s nothing more to be said. The speeches won’t be wanted any more.”

But now was Nadya passionately, distractedly, pleading with her.

“Jennie, for God’s sake! Don’t look at me like that!



I didn't know, I couldn't believe . . . two whole nights . . . you . . . this man! For God's sake don't hate me."

She was gripping Jennie's arms, flinging herself down at her feet. Great sobs convulsed her.

"Jennie, what have I done? I didn't know. But I believe you, Jennie. I believe you, Mr. Lee. And you needn't worry, Jennie! He's yours! *Yours*, I tell you. I'll go away! Yes, now! Yours . . . anything!"

"Please!" Tenderly Jennie lifted the weeping girl to her feet, calming her, stroking her gleaming hair, drawing Hinty's dressing-gown about her truant breasts. . . . "It had to come," she sighed. "Go back before you wake him."

Then, with her arm about Nadya, she turned to Lee.

"You'd better go!" she said again. "I'll 'phone you tomorrow."

"But I don't understand all this," he protested miserably. "I only know you ought not to be here. Look here! Let me get you a room at the hotel."

"Why?" she retorted, and shrugged her shoulders. Yet after a moment she was addressing Nadya.

"Get back to bed," she commanded gently. "No, do as I say. I want to talk to Mr. Lee. . . . And don't weep any more; don't worry. Just try to sleep."

Sobbing softly, Nadya went. The door closed behind her. Jennie faced him.

"But why do we have to talk?" she now mocked herself.

“Because,” he answered, and he paused only for a second, “I’m not going to let you stay here.”

“And then?”

“Well, you’ve learned your lesson about him. You’ll forget him. You’ll look for happiness elsewhere. . . . Yes, happiness! Jennie, you haven’t lost; you’ve gained.”

“Sure, sure!” came her bitter rejoinder. “I’m absolutely reeking with gain.”

Yet she fought that mood down; she grinned at him.

“Well, and assuming that I leave here, what does one do?” she exclaimed brightly.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “It’s hard to advise you—darned hard. I’m trying to keep my own feelings about you entirely out of the picture.

“But look here!” he blurted. “I ought to tell you! There’s still a vacant berth in that Shanghai boat I’m catching.”

She smiled.

“You reserved it, you mean?”

“Yes, but don’t misunderstand me. I did it in the first place, hoping to find someone here who’d take the place of that girl—that secretary who left me.”

“Well, you’ll probably find her,” she retorted.

And then, seeing his dismayed stare, she laughed.

“You’d better know something,” she said. “It may help you to understand what’s happened here tonight. At least, it will save your time. . . . I’m not your great and celestial White Goddess—nor his any longer! I’m merely that inexpert woman whom men find em-

barrassing—the woman who not only has sinned but commits the additional crime of letting her sin be found out! . . . Well, you'd better go home. Hardly the right sort of woman for a missionary's secretary, you'll agree."

### XXXIV

Lee went, but she was not surprised when, an hour or so later, he telephoned her. Half expecting it, she had already taken the precaution of ensuring that any telephone call would come direct to the extension in her own sitting-room.

"What is it?" she asked. "You'll be waking everybody."

He apologized. "But I couldn't bear to think of you alone there," he pleaded. "What are you doing?"

She shrugged her shoulders. She was still wearing the soiled clothes in which last he had seen her.

"Nothing very spectacular," she answered. "I'm neither packing my bags nor tearing Nadya's hair out. Absurd, I suppose! Not a bit like a novel or a play. But there it is! I've been watching the sunrise.

"And you?" she questioned.

"Well, it's sunrise in this part of the world also," he retorted, facetiously. "From this window I can see the rocks at low tide. Some men are wading among them, swinging lanterns and looking for—well, whatever they're looking for. They seem rather picturesque.

"But listen!" he exclaimed more urgently. "What

are you going to do? . . . There's still a vacant berth on that boat for Shanghai.”

She laughed.

“Well, with all the end-of-the-season holiday-makers rushing away from here, vacant berths are not to be despised,” she commented. “Still, when I last saw you, I was in earnest about myself. White and Celestial Goddesses are out of fashion.”

He was silent for a moment, but, even over the telephone, she could hear his harsh breathing.

“Jennie,” he answered at last, “you don't have to come to Chwan Hu. But you have to get away from that insulting environment. There's a berth on my boat, I said. It will get you out of here. Why not take it?”

She would not commit herself.

“Leave me to collect my thoughts a little while longer,” she pleaded. “And, if I'm going, I ought to be sorting out my wardrobe.

“Only a third of it seems to be of my own purchasing,” she almost added. But she restrained that jest; a second thought on it could hurt too much.

“Well, I must go!” she sighed instead. “I'll 'phone you after breakfast. I'll tell you definitely then whether I'm accepting that berth or not.”

She put down the receiver. She went to the window, looking to the sunrise again. He had spoken of the rocks at low tide. She could not see them. She saw only the opposite roofs; heard only the noisy, belated “drunks” from *Hinty's* arranging in the street below



a homeward rickshaw race. . . . "A dirty-thumbed cabaret proprietor!" Lee had once said that, and he was wrong about Hinty even now. Yet the words must tempt her anew.

At 7.30 came the *amah*, bringing grape-fruit. The woman's smile betrayed nothing.

"The races today," she said. "Not too hot for them, I think. Good!"

She went away. Jennie still sat in her clothes of the day before.

Then came a knock at the door. Surprisingly she saw Hinty there—grave, sober, ordinary; fully dressed.

"Good morning!" he greeted her; and then: "Well, where do we begin?"

He had startled her, but . . . "We don't!" she retorted. "We end!"

But any precocious schoolgirl, reacting from her first ill-fated love-affair, might have spoken thus. She regretted it immediately. She looked at him, wondering at his clean white linen suit, his freshly shaved face, his calmness.

She got to her feet.

"Dannie!" she uttered gently. "Why did you do it?"

Yet she could not forget it. . . . Nadya, bursting from his room, her gleaming hair disarrayed, the dressing-gown hurriedly covering her nakedness, her fierce hot challenge.

"Where is she?" she demanded then.

He winced.

“So you know!” he commented miserably. “The servants told you, I suppose. Anyhow, I came to make a clean breast of it . . . she’s here—in my room—asleep. I ought to wake her, but she’s—well, we’ve been beating it up——”

She interrupted him at last.

“You don’t need to tell me. I know!”

He nodded.

“Well, I’m glad,” he blurted. “It helps me. But, Jennie, directly she wakes, I’m sending her away, I promise you. . . . Yes, I’m ashamed.”

“Why?” she retorted coldly. “Why insult her so badly? Still, let’s talk of something more important. Nadya has probably told you a few things about me . . . Shanghai . . . my child!”

He stared at her bewilderedly.

“I don’t know how you’ve managed to learn all this, but—well, yes! She told me,” he confessed.

“But forget it, Jennie,” he pleaded. “Forget it, just as I intend to forget it too. I swear it! The only man who heard it was a poor, drink-sodden fool . . . crazed with fear and anxiety . . . ready to listen to anything. Believe me, Jennie, only that!”

She went to the window again.

“I do believe you,” she said. “But why must you men depend on a woman for your every little ounce of solidity? Why must you crumble to pieces directly she steps away from you for a moment?”

“Jennie, I was jealous of him—of Lee! And now you have it! I was jealous all along.”

She smiled at him, tenderly almost.

“Why didn’t you come looking for us?”

He frowned.

“I didn’t want to, Jennie. I loved you, trusted you. It was impossible, I told myself——”

“Foolish!”

“And I kept on telling myself. And then? Well, the hours and hours . . . the drink . . . *Nadya!*”

“Foolish again,” she chided him gently. “How impossible you men are . . . always striving to put some woman on a ridiculous, sanctified pedestal of your own making, yet crying like babies when inevitably she falls off.

“And you haven’t even asked me about Lee!” she could not resist adding. “Why apologize to me? Perhaps it isn’t necessary.”

He came across the room to her, his smile dimmed only by the merest shadow of his doubt. He took hold of her arms; he stared into her eyes. He grinned, he shook his head.

“No!” he uttered. “I won’t believe it. You can’t make me.”

And then calmly he confronted her with that question.

“Jennie, I came here ready to confess everything. I’ve done it. . . . What are you going to do with me?”

She hesitated. She looked away from him.

"I don't know," she faltered. "An hour ago I'd persuaded myself I never wanted to see you again, but—well, you took me by surprise."

His hands still gripped her.

"Anything else?" he asked, whisperingly.

She was trying not to smile.

"Well, yes," she answered absurdly. "I'm glad you're up and about . . . dressed and shaved and looking your best, I mean! I didn't expect it. And—well, you ought to be ringing for your morning tea."

And yet as she spoke, that picture leapt out from her memory again . . . Nadya pleading with her; kneeling, sobbing out her contrition; and yet, protesting ever that fierce, defensive love of him.

Suddenly she broke from him.

"Dannie, I can't!" she cried. "I mean, I've got to go away. You'd better know it. I'm going on the Shanghai boat tomorrow."

She knew that he was dismayed; surprised, perhaps. But he contrived to grin. He sat down.

"Well," he began half-jestingly. "I must never forget I'm in the presence of someone who's taught me all I know. . . . At least, all of it that's worth while. So I'll try to be thoroughly and conspicuously British . . . 'count ten' . . . 'maintain a steady bat' . . . 'keep a stiff upper lip,' and all that! Though, speaking of lips, it's always the bottom lip that walks out on one, I've found. . . . However, tomorrow you're going, you say. The boats are rather crowded. You may have difficulty in getting a berth."



She was trembling, but . . . "I've got a berth," she answered. "Mr. Lee has offered me one."

"Lee!" He winced. He stared his surprise. "But you can't hurt me with him, Jennie," he cried proudly. "I know it—you don't love him, not a scrap."

"As for that vacant berth," he retorted laughingly, "well, you can't fool me. Tell me the truth about it."

Beneath that healthy unbelief, she had to satisfy him. At which he laughed again and got up, and rang the bell.

"Bring tea," he ordered the "boy."

"Oh, and take tea to Miss Nadya . . . *skokuniang!*" he added. "Make sure that she wakes up."

Then he sat down again, carefully hitching up the legs of his faultless trousers.

"So you want to go," he resumed. "Well, I don't want to be melodramatic. You'd hate it. So would I, most likely. . . . But you know what happens if you go. The man you were trying to make of me is that man no longer. Half-way up the hill he stops dead, rolls back."

But she had long ago expected that utterance.

"He doesn't, my dear," she retorted. "He can't. Listen. He's that man already. How else could Nadya change from indifference about you to worshipping you . . . Nadya, of all people?"

"And that's the only reason why I'm going. Not because you've insulted me—you haven't!—only because she loves you. So be sensible, Dannie. Life's short. Marry her; be happy with her."

“And if I don’t marry her?”

“Well, I couldn’t make you. But I’d always understand that you wanted me to respect you. She’s on a different plane now. Once it was only her body, but now it’s something more. You can’t do as you did yesterday and then kick her out like a harlot.”

He got up, distractedly pacing the room.

“Marry Nadya!” he echoed. “And she’s a good girl—yes! . . . But you don’t surely mean it. Look at me, Jennie! I know you don’t.”

“Dannie, I want to respect you.”

“Yes! But answer me. You love me too. I know it: I’ve seen it.”

She faltered.

“Dannie, I like you very, very much. I shall always like you, I think.”

But too dangerous was that thought of him. She found her cigarette-case. She held it open to him.

“Dannie, I’m going. I mean it—absolutely.”

He struck a match for her. “See; I’ve still a steady hand!” he laughed. Yet his desperate jesting was done.

“Very well,” he murmured, and bent his head.

“But, Jennie!”—he broke for a moment from that deepening despair—“Jennie, when my boat was leaving for Shanghai and you were waving good-bye, you shouted something. I couldn’t hear it; the noise of that darned old siren killed it. What was it you were trying to tell me?”

She did not answer.

“Still, I remember the look in your eyes,” came his

strange whisper. "I shall always remember it. . . . Jennie, what was it?"

Her tears were welling, escaping unchecked to her cheeks. Almost did she break down, casting on him her misery. But she mustered a smile.

"I can't remember!" she lied. "Oh yes! It was this . . . 'Write to me,' I said. And, Dannie, that goes not only for now, but for all time. Yes, I'm your friend . . . always . . . always while I can respect you. And if ever——"

But she cut that utterance short. The "boy" was entering with tea; yet behind him, and now fully dressed, stood Nadya Skolnikova also—pale, weary-eyed, pathetically hesitant.

"Jennie! Dannie! It's only for a moment. May I come in?" she begged.

He had heard those words, but he did not turn to look at her; he did not speak. A great, impressive silence was on him. Only could he stare at Jennie in a long, unflinching gaze.

And then, strangely nodding, he addressed the softly moving "boy."

"Oh yes! Tea!" he exclaimed. "Three cups! . . . Er—yes! Thank you, boy!"

At which he turned at last and, smiling gravely, went to the door.

"Come in, Nadya! Won't you sit down? . . . Our good friend Jennie has to go away from us. So soon. I think we ought to tell her how much we—we owe her for everything—how much we shall miss her."

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XXXV

She was sailing away from him.

Never again might she see his tolerant grin or hear his gently plodding voice. The days would pass; her memory of him grow old; the clamorous and urgent Tomorrow would call a new and alien tune in her heart. She was sailing away. But could she yet believe it?

She looked at Lee as they tramped the deck in the afternoon sunshine. Speech such as hers might be difficult, for she must loathe the over-populated ship as she would a crowded side-walk. But she contrived somehow to answer him.

“Yes, yes! I’ll come to Chwan Hu with you. I’ve already promised you. You don’t have to fear. A job . . . bread-and-butter. . . . Yes, of course! Something to make me forget.

“But don’t ever misunderstand me,” she breathed. “I love him!”





BOOK FOUR

RIVER OF TWISTED STAIRS



## I

ONCE more had she met the River.

Shanghai was behind, cooling itself in the late October days; Nanking, where memory could importune one, and yet with mellowing, softened voice; Wuhu, Kiukiang, great Hankow. And then, one afternoon, with the sharp hills of Ichang confronting them, they got from the steamer and stretched their cramped legs.

“The River of Twisted Stairs!” he exclaimed.

## II

The River of Twisted Stairs!

No geographer has called it thus. It is only his own name for it. But it is not inapt. At Ichang, a thousand miles from the sea and yet over two thousand miles from the mighty Yangtse's source, the traveller up-river leaves his ship and in a specially constructed vessel must, for the next three hundred and fifty miles, face danger almost at every hour. No longer is the river a broad, placid flood. It races angrily through narrow tortuous gorges whose sides rise sheer and wall-like from their dark, unfathomed beds. Or, where the imprisoning gorges relent and the river runs wider, long glistening rapids impede its course, dissipating themselves in treacherous whirlpools or flinging them-



selves at rocks against which a steamer would smash like an egg.

Jennie had heard much of the upper river already from her fellow-passengers. They told, almost unbelievably, of how during the flood-season the river could rise a hundred feet in a single night; of how modern steamers, built expressly for that task and with engines of over 2000 horse-power, would fail at the stronger rapids and have to be dragged over them by rope and windlass. They told also of the river's grim history. Almost daily some native junk was sucked down by the whirlpools, or pirated by the river's roving outlaws; while such was the river's toll of lives that, at certain of its ports, whole communities of boat-dwellers made their living by spearing the corpses of drowned boatmen and selling them to a benevolent "burial-board" at a few cents a time.

Yet sometimes, when they had concluded their stories, they would look at Jennie, marvelling at her youth, her freshness, the arresting ring of her voice. And at night, over their drinks, the men made fierce, protesting comment:

"Going to Chwan Hu, eh? A missionary. . . . A girl like that! God, what a waste!"

### III

But if ever she was aware of those sentiments about her, they did not disturb her. Nor was she distressed too deeply by the obvious way in which, during the

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journey from Shanghai, the majority of their fellow-passengers had avoided Lee. Already had he taught her to expect it. "Don't ask anyone to like us missionaries," he had warned her. "We're the people who, according to our critics, are teaching John Chinaman to lick himself clean when he ought to be licking his white master's boots.

"Still, you're not a missionary," he was careful to add. "So you don't necessarily have to agree with me."

And, although she gave him her laughing reassurance, that utterance had comforted her. If still she nursed that vague, lingering fear of him, she could dismiss it for a moment with her common-sense gratitude. He asked nothing of her, not even her respect for his opinions. She was free.

They spent the night at Ichang as the guests of a mission-doctor. After dinner the three of them went down in the moonlight to see the fleets of native junks that made the town a base for their upriver traffic. The junks should make an interesting sight, Jennie's host suggested, for now were they congregating and taking on cargoes in anticipation of the low-water season, almost due, when they would be able to ascend the perilous river more easily. Yet that would be a difficult enough undertaking, she was assured, for often in negotiating the three hundred and fifty miles to Chungking a vessel took as long as two months.

With a mob of unchecked beggars crowding about them, Jennie listened to the doctor while he commented expertly on a great tall-masted junk that would sail

on the morrow. It had shipped its last bale of cargo and now its crew were giving themselves to the traditional and noisy ceremony of scaring away the river's evil spirits. Beneath the tense October moonlight men were moving, black and monkey-like, as they hastily dressed the ungainly wooden vessel with red streamers; while, to the accompaniment of bursting fire-crackers and the beating of gongs, a cock had just been killed and its blood sprinkled on the deck. The noise and well-wishing would last the night through.

The doctor was answering Jennie's fascinated murmur.

"Yes, if you could go on that junk instead of your comfortable steamer, you'd see enough to fill a book.

"Still, thank heaven, Lee, that she's not!" he added, with a glance at her companion.

Which strange emphasis reminded her of something. The doctor did not appear to approve too much of Lee. And more than once she had overheard cryptic fragments of their subdued conversation.

"Quite!" had come one of the doctor's frowning retorts. "But why use a delicate thoroughbred for the work of cart-horses?"

#### IV

Next morning they set forth on a steamer which would make the run to Chungking in four days. The steamer was a new and foreign-built vessel and, like all other mechanical craft plying the upper river, car-

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ried a second propeller and two extra rudders. One noticed too the stout steel mesh which isolated the bridge and the "first-class" quarters from the rest of the ship; while, as an additional precaution against bandits, the bridge was capped with movable, eyeletted shutters of armoured plate which could be dropped to enclose it at a moment's notice.

"And what are the bandits like?" he echoed her inquiry. "Well, a bandit in China may be anybody, from an illiterate cut-throat up to an imposing warlord who was expensively educated in America. There's the man who struggles to feed a down-at-heel army; there's the poor half-hearted devil who apologizes for demanding a dollar from you and finishes up by confessing he's only a simple farmer whose crops have been taken by a bigger bandit. . . . But they're all hungry. They're all forgivable."

Their ship ploughed on, calmly and untroubled for a while, for in the first thirty miles above Ichang the river is placid and still fairly wide. They passed a small square-sailed fishing-boat returning with its catch, its idle net held quaintly by five supporting beams. Later, with its great towing-mast unstepped, there swept past them a large down-going junk laden with wood-oil and salt, a dozen standing oarsmen pulling at each of its long *yulos* or sculling-sweeps. Their voices wafted across the flood in harsh rhythmic chorus.

After a few hours, however, they came to the first of the rapids. They heard from the engine-room the sound of a bell; at which suddenly the ship was vibrat-



ing unpleasantly beneath the full application of its 2000 horse-power. In a moment there lived about its bows a great seething fury of water.

The roar and the vibration at last died. "Just a baby rapid!" Lee pronounced. But he handed her his glasses, bidding her look at an up-going junk behind them which, having stood inshore to give their vessel the legitimate precedence accorded to mechanical craft, would now face the rapid also.

"They won't find it quite so easy!" he murmured.

She watched as, manœuvred by straining oarsmen, the junk emerged slowly from the boulder-strewn inshore into the flood. Awaiting it on a rocky promontory three hundred yards upstream were the eighty or more half-naked "trackers" who, when it had cleared the dangerous shore, would drag it over the rapid with a long hawser of bambooskin, yet stout and fully six inches thick, attached to its mast. The "trackers," at the command of a huge fellow armed with a cane, were now fastening themselves to the end of the hawser with short hand-lines, each hand-line being secured to a man's body by the device of a broad piece of padded webbing which passed over his left shoulder and under his right arm in the manner of a cavalryman's bandolier. The men, at another gesture from the fellow who commanded them, were now spreading themselves fan-wise over the promontory's uneven crest, each of them seeking a place where some sort of rough track might lie inconveniently in his path. While they did this, there came from the junk itself the short, sharp tattoo

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of a drum; it had found the stream; in a moment it would be battling against a current running at ten or more knots. The men began to hurry forward, straining at the hawser until it was nearly taut. Then suddenly a few of them were jerked to their haunches, for, while the warning tattoo of the drum rose up to them again, the junk had met the current. The hawser was a pulsing, living thing—they its slaves.

The ascent of the rapid began. With the drum now pounding out a heavy rhythm, one saw the trackers moving to their task like a huge, ragged dog-team. Sometimes, with the great tow-rope pressing down on them, they must bend themselves almost double or go on all-fours, wresting a half-dozen yards of progress in as many minutes. Often at a signal they would halt, while, down at the river's edge, naked swimmers freed the rope from the grip of projecting rocks. Yet the halt was no respite; they must strain against the rope's heavy weight, keeping themselves from being dragged down with it. And then, with the rope freed and alive again, and the drum thumping out its command, they would stumble on, their leader flogging their backs with his cane, or dancing and clowning before them with noisy, heartening buffoonery; while always, as they moved, they uttered the strange, unforgettable chant of their trade. *Ai!* they sang; that lone, untranslatable monosyllable beginning deep down in their throats like the middle-C of a church organ, yet ascending in pitch until, on the highest notes of which they were capable, it shattered. A strange sound; there is

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no description that shall convey it to the ear that has not already heard it. It is the tracker's own prayer for life; for, if he is silent and his lungs are idle, then the great rope will press down on them and constrict them, until at last they are cramped and immovable, and the slow, wasting death is in them.

The steamer was now passing round a bend of the river and losing sight of the junk. But still, through her glasses, could Jennie see the trackers toiling like patient ants round the promontory. No longer were they spread out fanwise. With a sharp wall of rock rising up at their elbows they were moving in Indian file along a narrow ledge, a precipitous drop beneath them.

And then she cried out suddenly. One of the trackers had missed his footing and, while still he gripped his hand-line, his legs were dangling in mid-air. Almost in the same moment, unbalanced by the sudden jerk at the hawser, the man behind him was in difficulties too. He had not yet lost his footing, but helplessly and at an oblique angle, his body leaned over the sheer drop to the river.

The team had halted, the men pressing their bodies to the rock to combat the hawser's pull. Perilously the leader was returning and endeavouring to rescue the threatened trackers, his hand gripping the shoulder-pad of each man whom he must slither past. At last he reached them, and slowly he was able to pull the second man to safety. But the plight of the other man was beyond his efforts. Suddenly Jennie moved the



glasses from her eyes and shuddered, handing them back to Lee. In the hand of the leader she had seen a knife.

Lee, putting away the glasses, was at last answering her distressed questions.

"Yes, they cut him down. He fell to the rocks. There's a chance, if he's still alive, that somebody will be able to do something for him. Pretty grim! But they had to do it. If they hadn't, and two or three more of 'em had slipped, there was the danger that they'd all be in the water. And the junk? Well, it would just go hurtling back until it found the first rock."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, come and have a drink before I start preaching about it!" he exclaimed bitterly. "But this is the China where a man is somewhat less valuable than a beast that draws a cart. The beast is stronger. When it dies you can eat it. . . . Yet they don't need any missionaries!"

## V

The ship toiled on, halting each sunset as did all other craft on the river, and resuming its journey at daybreak. Once at a rapid it encountered a current so fierce that the 2000 horse-power of its engines failed it. A line had to be carried from its deck to a point beyond the racing waters, its own windlass hauling it across them. But more of fascination to Jennie were



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the deep, frowning gorges. At most of them could be seen the little bamboo huts where the men of the Customs service had their look-out stations. Not only did they watch for the coming of bandits, but, by a system of semaphore signals at each end of a gorge, warned down-coming craft of a steamer's approach. In that narrow channel with its walls rising sheer from the water, the wash of a vessel going at full speed ran behind it like a huge tidal bore. The junk that was luckless enough to encounter it would most certainly be doomed.

One afternoon when the ship was setting a gorge echoing with the bay of its great siren, the first officer invited Jennie and Lee to see the bridge. They watched the pilot, a short, sombre Chinese, directing the helmsman. No word passed between the two men, but ever was the helmsman's gaze riveted on the pilot's raised forefinger which, moving almost imperceptibly to right or left, gave him his orders. In the narrow, crooked gorge, a straight course was impossible. Terrifying for one who watched that seemingly suicidal manoeuvre for the first time, the pilot navigated his vessel, in zig-zag fashion, propelling it from wall to wall of the solid rock.

"Yes, sometimes a pilot makes an error of judgment," the first officer agreed laconically. "And then? Well, this isn't the friendly Atlantic exactly. All you can do is rush a load of cement to the hole and hope for the best."

They left the bridge and, thanking the first officer

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for his courtesy, returned to watching the river's ever-changing scenery. Now, with the gorge passed and the river widening again, they saw stretching before them range after range of great razor-backed mountains, their dazzling majestic peaks exciting her gasp of wonder.

"You like it?" he murmured.

"Yes!" she breathed. "But I've been watching those mountains for two whole days. They're never-ending."

"Yes, never-ending!" he echoed. "You could go on . . . days, weeks, months . . . trying to put them behind you, and they'd still be there . . . places where a white man has never set foot!

"And there are men who boast that they *know* China," he laughed, "and tell you how they'd cure its ills with a League of Nations pow-wow, or a few gunboats, or a bit of jugglery with the rate of exchange . . . men who have seen no more of it than a Shanghai bar or the Legation quarter at Peking. Still, that applies almost as truly to us missionaries, I guess. Pour all the missionaries of the world into China, and they'd have no more effect on it than throwing an egg at those mountains.

"Still, I'm preaching again!" he reproved himself. "Forget it. Let's just say you like it here."

"I do!"

"And it doesn't frighten you?"

"Why should it?"

"And Tsingtao?"

"Don't!" she murmured. "But it's forgotten," she added quickly, and smiled. "It's behind!"

Yet was it forgotten? Later that afternoon, when Lee had gone to his cabin for a while, the ship's first officer was claiming her company again.

"So you're from Tsingtao! I was there this summer," he exclaimed enthusiastically. "Did you ever dance at a place called *Hinty's*?"

"No!" she lied desperately; and "No!" he echoed apologetically. "I guess you wouldn't have been to the place. Hardly your class of entertainment."

But long after he had gone his words were still wringing her. . . .

"Great chap, Hinty!" he had uttered garrulously. "You ought to have met him. I played golf with him one day. They say he has a tragedy . . . in love with a woman . . . someone far and high above him. Looking at him, I could quite believe it! . . . Face like a philanthropist with a cart-load of money, and no one to give it to!"

## VI

On their fourth evening from Ichang, the ship reached its destination and they saw the great cliff-like mass of Chungking, the upper river's largest city. They had now been travelling for nearly three weeks, and were jaded from lack of exercise. But the river still claimed them. Next morning, in a new and smaller vessel, they set out again.

At last, however, there came an afternoon when he pointed to where in a fold of scarred sandstone hills lay a huddled mass of roofs flanked by two guardian pagodas, while down below that place, on a shingly waterfront, was the activity of a small port.

"Chwan Hu!" he uttered. "Welcome to it, Jennie!"

But now that, at long last, that moment had come, she could no longer find words for it. She must stand silent, like a small and hesitant child.

"Thanks!" was all she could whisper.

Yet she must summon a smile. The steamer had halted and a couple of sampans that would serve as tenders for the removal of passengers and their baggage were drawing alongside. In one of them were several of Lee's male subordinates, greeting them noisily. "Welcome to Chwan Hu!" they cried, and, helping her into the sampan, wrung her hand almost before Lee could introduce them.

And then strangely they began to stare at her, seeming to take surprised stock of her . . . her face, her youthfulness, her trim tailored suit.

"So you're the new secretary, eh?" a young doctor was exclaiming. "Well, the old place certainly seems to be improving."

Yet his grin died. He glanced suddenly at Lee's broad back as he turned to give some direction to the baggage-coolies. There was question in that glance, hostility almost; and the reflection of that mood was surely in the faces of his companions.



But Lee was turning to them again. Someone coughed; another laughed.

"Well, sir," the young doctor addressed him hastily. "What sort of trip did you have? I hope you're better."

The sampan landed them on a dirty foreshore where, with the low-water season just begun, a temporary town of primitive hutments was rapidly springing up. The shingle was dense with eating-houses, sweetmeat stalls, opium parlours, brothels; while, as daily the river receded, the mushroom settlement would grow larger, more fiercely competitive for the passing rivermen's pence. Lee was now taking her arm, piloting her across the crowded, evil-smelling stretch. As though aware of her discomfiture, he grinned.

"This spot is hardly a good introduction to Chwan Hu," he murmured. "Still, if it isn't pretty, it's plucky. Sometimes in the night the river alters its mind. Instead of falling six feet it rises a dozen——"

"And drowns the lot!" the young doctor behind them exclaimed crisply.

But she wondered once more, musing now on the manner of the young doctor's remark. There had been challenge in it, derision surely; while, hearing those words, instead of echoing them, Lee was suddenly and frowningly silent.

Reaching the town's grey, earthen bund and its ancient water-gate her companions ushered her into a sedan chair. She had thought that it would separate her from Lee, but soon, as the chairmen began to toil

up a steep and narrow stairway flanked with shops, his chair was abreast of her.

"Well, I'm in harness again!" he exclaimed. "Pity me!"

And then he lowered his voice.

"Young Clements, that doctor chap, is leaving here," he murmured.

"I'm sorry," she was about to answer. "I rather like him." But she noted his pale, drawn face. The utterance might have been indiscreet. She waited for him to continue. . . .

"There's nothing particularly wrong with him, of course, except that he's very young, and—well, as I've said before, a missionary-doctor is usually a better doctor than he is a missionary."

She smiled, murmuring non-committally; they fell silent. Then, because of the crowded street, his chair had to fall behind her. When next the way was clear, her company was claimed by someone else.

At last, well beyond the town, the procession of chairs and baggage-coolies was halting. She saw the gateway of a large, high-walled compound. There was a bustle of white-robed coolies about them. They had reached the mission.

Lee was coming gravely and helping her from the chair.

"Welcome!" he uttered.

Welcome! The word seemed to echo all about her. But still could she only nod, or whisper her brief, monosyllabic thanks. Mechanically she followed him

into a wide, stone-paved courtyard set with ornamental garden-plots. "Welcome!" she heard again, and now it came from a hundred or more Chinese youths and girls who, drawn up in two rows in the manner of a guard-of-honour, flanked the approach to the mission's main building.

"Welcome!" they chanted in sing-song unison. "Welcome to our reverend pastor . . . Pastor Lee, we hope that you are better."

Their noise died. Reluctantly, Lee was excusing himself and relinquishing her to the care of his colleagues while he acknowledged the greeting. Forcing himself to a grin, he now began the laborious business of offering each of the students his hand-shake. And then, once more, she heard the voice of young Clements, the doctor.

"It looks as though he's going to be busy!" he exclaimed. "Come and stretch your legs."

She hesitated, but seeing the approving grins of the other men, she let him lead her away.

And then he glanced in the direction of Lee.

"They've been rehearsing that *heil Handsome* stuff for him for the past three days," he jested. "Still, don't underestimate 'em. That isn't the only English they know. They can say *please . . . thank you . . . give me . . .* especially *give me!*"

"Who are they?" she asked him, trying to ignore that sarcasm.

"They're the mission's elect; the bright senior lads and lasses who've learned all the answers; the fully

fledged converts. They'll leave here soon. The girls will continue their education at the white man's expense and gratefully blossom out as Communist blue-stockings. If the men can't hook a government job at Nanking, they'll buy themselves a smart uniform, collect a few peasants together, and go bandit. . . . And you come to this!"

"You don't seem to like it."

"Like it!" he retorted. "It makes me sick."

Perhaps it was a dangerous topic to pursue, but . . . "What's your objection to Mr. Lee?" she challenged him suddenly. At which he frowned and reddened.

"I haven't mentioned Lee," he countered.

"But there *is* an objection," she persisted. "What exactly have you against him?"

She heard his uncomfortable laugh.

"Heaven knows," he answered. "Try to find something definite against him, and one fails."

"But forget it," he pleaded suddenly. "I'm hardly being fair to him. He's always treated me decently and, if there's ever been a quarrel between us, it was always of my own making. I guess I'm too cheeky; too ready to poke fun at him without looking for the good in him."

Yet in a moment she heard his boyishly impulsive protest:

"But why does he have to bring you here? Why doesn't he bring someone who's tired of life, or has never learned to live it?"



She smiled.

"Well, I ought to feel flattered. But supposing I came because I wanted to?" she retorted. "You see, Doctor Clements, I have to earn my living like the rest of you."

"And why not?"

"But you don't fool me!" came his suddenly tense utterance. "You're afraid of him. I saw it when you left that boat. You almost walked out on him. . . ."

"How absurd!" she protested, but she knew that she was trembling.

"No," he continued grimly. "You've seen in him what I see. He's mad, I tell you. And it's a madness all the more dangerous because it masquerades as fervour . . . zeal . . . and all the rest of the self-sacrificing bunk."

She interrupted him desperately.

"Don't!" she begged. "People will be wondering what we're talking about."

But he shook his head.

"It might not matter," he retorted. "I'm not exactly alone in my opinions. But you've got to know it. I'm a doctor, even if only a half-baked one. I've watched his mind; I know what's eating it. He's married—chained up to a lunatic wife who can never——"

She cut him short again.

"I know it. He told me. But, Doctor Clements, why tell me this? I came here to get my living. Just that! No more! If I'm unhappy here, I can go elsewhere."

"Quite! And you probably will. But, if you don't, well . . . "

He paused unhappily.

"Well, perhaps I ought to shut up," he continued. "But you women are strange creatures. Once you start pitying a man, there's no knowing where it will lead you. And that's just the danger with Lee. He excites pity, I guess, just because of the darned fool he is."

"What do you mean by that?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It's not the best of topics," he answered, "but, put bluntly, it's this: while most men in his position would find another woman, Lee refuses to."

"And then?"

"Well, I hope I don't sound any more pagan than the average man, but, instead of reading it as a piece of self-maiming idiocy, you women are apt to glorify it . . . admiration and pity mingling. And that's a horribly dangerous blend!"

"You seem to know rather a lot about women," she retorted. "But why should pity and admiration be dangerous if someone's deserving of it?"

He frowned.

"You mean, you can trust him," he commented. "Yes, I suppose you can. But you're still trying to bluff me. You see in him what I see. He's in love with you . . . crazily, hopelessly . . . in the way few other men would be content to love you. And you know it—flattering as it may be for five minutes, it's all wrong; it's madness. Once you fell for it, you'd be more a

prisoner than the other sort of woman. He'd imprison your soul while the rest of you died."

"You should have been a novelist," she teased him. At which he grinned ruefully.

"Should I?" he answered. "Well, blame my ancestry. My father was a commercial traveller, my grandfather a parson. But here's something you *can't* quarrel with. There's such a thing as a dance-frock . . . lights, music, a 'sprung' floor, a bottle of 'bubbly' . . . someone like this humble sinner telling you you're good to look at . . . marrying you; that's if he could tell the tale sufficiently well. Don't be such a little fool!"

She flushed, but she managed to control herself and smile.

"It's still all very melodramatic," she reproved him softly. "And totally unnecessary. In fact, if I weren't so sure you meant it in the right way, I might even suggest that you minded your own business."

But he was unabashed.

"Suggest on!" he retorted lightly. "And I still haven't finished. . . . When a girl like you comes rushing full-speed at a joint like this, there's usually only one answer. Probably he was a very foolish sort of guy, but a nice guy nevertheless. Why not go back and give him another chance?"

Then, as that indignant answering protest broke impetuously from her, she fell suddenly silent. Lee was approaching her, with him a tall, elderly woman who stared at her frank and frowning disapproval of them.

But Lee merely smiled.

"Thank you, Clements," he exclaimed politely. Smiling still, he introduced the two women . . . "Miss Winston, our housekeeper," he identified his companion. Finally he laughed.

"Well, excuse us, Clements," he uttered then. "Miss Winston ought to be showing Miss Davidson her quarters."

Yet that apparent calmness had not for a moment deceived Jennie.

## VII

That evening, as he sat in the office in which she would work with him, he sent for her. But, at first, he made no mention of young Clements.

Outside his open window was a group of poorly clad Chinese, some of them old, but mostly young women and children. Obviously they were new-comers to the place, for a young missionary woman, questioning each of them in turn, was reciting their particulars to a native clerk who stood by with a note-book.

Lee was greeting Jennie cheerfully, bidding her sit down.

"Don't think I intend rushing you into harness too quickly," he began. "But this is my private office. I thought you might like to see it. And the people outside may interest you also. They're our latest batch of unfortunates, just arrived. I've just been giving them the once-over."



He pointed to a Chinese mother and her trio of scared little children.

"Some more victims of the river," he commented. "The father was a boatman, drowned a few weeks ago up at Suifu. The woman may be difficult to deal with. We'll feed her, clothe her, but she has all the prejudices of the old China ingrained in her. We can't hope for much. Still, she'll be worth it. Her three kids are young enough to be moulded into useful stuff."

His expert gaze rested for a moment on another refugee, a fat, bearded fellow wearing a flat, blue turban.

"A farmer, he tells me . . . says he's sick, and the magistrates have taken his land for road-making. One often hears it, but probably he's dodging his debtors. Or maybe he's killed somebody, and wants a hide-out for a while. But he won't stay long, I fancy. He's plump, fit as a fiddle; the doctors will probably mark him for the road again.

"And here's another old scallywag who won't exactly repay us," he continued with a grin. He pointed to a lean, ashen-faced old man who, squatting dejectedly on his haunches, unseeingly eyed the dust. "A typical opium addict," he exclaimed. "We have special refuges for his sort. But one of the hopeless cases, I fear; he's been in and out of here for years; we'll never cure him.

"Still," he added cheerfully, "you can't ration a cow according to the milk she gives. We've got to have him back again. The only ratio you can apply is this: the

greater the misery you encounter, the greater your pre-occupation and happiness in fighting it. Yes, fill a hundred per cent need and you get a hundred per cent happiness."

And then he laughed and went to close the window.

"But it isn't everyone in this place who'll agree with me," he murmured. "Tell me, what was young Clements saying about me this afternoon?"

She flushed, but long ago had her retort been ready for him.

"He's very young," she answered non-committally. "Likable in some things, but rather given to exaggeration. I think he'll be happier when he gives up mission work. When does he leave here?"

"I don't know. He hasn't said. I've only heard rumours that he's trying to join a clinic in Shanghai, though he'll need quite an amount of money for that, if he's to get a good practice.

"Perhaps he won't leave here," he added musingly, and gave her his uneasily questioning stare.

But he recovered himself. He smiled again.

"Indeed, he doesn't have to leave," he continued. "Still, he's a slightly revolutionary influence here. It might be better. But, tell me, what sort of advice did he give you about me? I fancy he regards me as some sort of rather unnatural misfit. And, viewed by his standards, perhaps he's right. But tell me, what did he say?"

She had found her composure now. She could laugh.

"Why make it so personal?" she countered. "If he

criticized you, you're just a convenient symbol for the rest of what's irksome to him here. If someone else occupied your place he'd criticize him just the same, I imagine."

"I wonder!" he breathed.

"And what does it matter?" she went on soothingly. "Surely it only matters what I am thinking of you?"

He nodded. She heard his sighing relief.

"Thanks," he said. But again, beneath his smile, she saw his troubled doubt.

"Yes, thanks," he uttered. "Still, that might not be too flattering either."

She bent her head, silent, unhappy, unprepared even now with that answer which so inevitably was expected of her. But in that moment she could not logically fear him. The effects of her distressed mental wrestling with young Clements had worn off. Looking now at Lee, she saw him only as she had seen him in those last days at Tsingtao . . . calm, refreshed, confident; a man, surely. Recalling that memory of young Clements, she almost laughed.

At last she was attempting to satisfy him; respectfully, sincerely.

"What do I think of you? I don't quite know. But I'll answer a question you haven't asked me. Ridiculous, perhaps, but it may help us . . . I don't love you."

"I know it!"

"And I don't want you to love me," she continued quickly.

He winced, but he grinned again.

"That might be beyond my control," he retorted. "Still, go on! Why would it be so offensive to you?"

"It wouldn't be offensive; at least, it needn't be. But can't you see it's only this? I don't want you to love me because I don't want to be vital to your happiness. Yes, and now you have it. I'm selfish. I don't want to be necessary to anybody. I want to be free; not only physically free, mentally free!"

He nodded. But . . . "Freedom!" he whispered at last. "What is freedom? One can be physically free—yes! Yet mentally free? I wonder! One is chained to every vagrant thought that comes knocking at one's door, and whether it's great, ordinary, or detestable."

He leaned forward to her, touching her hand for a moment.

"But if freedom lies in ignoring what I dream about you," he continued, "take it, do as you like with it. Yes, you may even laugh at me as young Clements does; I wouldn't kick. All I ask is only this—your happiness."

She looked at him, surprised again as he had often surprised her, yet wondering even now was he sincere. But the wintry dusk had crept into the room; no longer could she see his eyes; she heard only his voice . . . deep, gently calm, unhurrying.

And then, while she pondered, there came a knock at the door. The young woman whom she had seen outside the window with the mission's new-comers was now asking his help.



"The old chappie for the 'cure' is taking fright and becoming naughty," she explained. "The pangs are on him, he says. If we don't get him into the refuge right away, he'll walk out."

He laughed.

"The opium-refuge is away back in the hills," he explained to Jennie. "It's safer for 'em there. They're not so much tempted to break out again."

"Still, can't you do something for him?" he asked the other girl. "Why not take him over to the dispensary?"

She murmured her agreement.

"But I understood you'd given orders to the contrary," she countered. "Which was why I consulted you. The hospital isn't to be bothered with these opium cases, I was told."

He laughed again, mischievously almost.

"Quite right!" he assured her. "Orders are orders, aren't they? And I like them to be carried out. But don't worry. . . . Send the old fellow in to me."

"And don't wait," he added. "I'll deal with him myself."

The old man came, gravely kowtowing, then urgently pouring out his plaint. Jennie could not understand it, but long before it was ended Lee was translating it for her.

"He trusts our magic to cure him, but he can't wait till morning for it. If we don't do something for him now, he must either get more opium or die."

"What are you going to do?" she murmured.

“Well, I wouldn’t dream of offending that conscientious young woman for the world!” he answered. “Orders are orders. He’ll have to be patient.”

But he bent and unlocked a drawer in his desk, groping in it until he had found a small white pill-box. Opening it, he motioned the old man to his side and put something in his palm. “Swallow it,” he commanded him, and watched while, hesitantly, the Chinese obeyed. Then, having pressed a bell, and given him into the care of a *t’ing-ch’ai*, he dismissed him. “Be happy! Sleep well!” he said.

“So you keep a private dispensary of your own?” she teased him, when the old man had gone. “Most irregular.”

“Most!” he agreed. “In fact, it’s worse than that. If you’re thinking that dope I’ve given him is the ‘cure’, it’s not! I don’t keep the stuff. Besides, it wouldn’t do him any good. Before morning he’d be raving for more.”

“Then what did you give him?”

He got to his feet and laughed.

“Well, orders are orders, and what I’m telling you is something you don’t repeat to people like that earnest young woman, for example. But I’ve dealt with old sweats like old Hsi before. What he’s had is the real thing—opium itself!

“And why not?” he added. “It’s *happiness* I’m trying to give people. If the mission and its red-tape have to keep him waiting till tomorrow before he can be given the approved sort of happiness, why torture him

in the meantime? Better his own sort of happiness than none at all."

At which he went and switched on the light.

"Well, I guess you've plenty of unpacking to do," he exclaimed. "I'll see you at supper."

But she lingered.

"Happiness!" she echoed musingly.

"Sure!" he exclaimed briskly. "One per cent of it for each one per cent of need that you fill. A hundred per cent of it if you can find the task that demands a hundred per cent also. . . . But run along!"

And then she was going to him, gripping his arm impulsively.

"I've been foolish!" she cried. "Foolish and suspicious and ungrateful. But I'll try for that happiness. I swear it."

## VIII

The brief, mild winter had come and gone. When the warm rains of spring had lifted it would be summer in a day; the orange-groves glistening, the corn sighing. Was she happy? Did she still sometimes know that sense of "marking time"? She could not say. But she had been at Chwan Hu over six months. And life was full. She had forgotten to count the passing days. She could forget Yesterday with the morning clamouring at her window and proclaiming the responsibilities of Today.

It had not been easy to achieve that tranquility, how-

ever. The mission-station was large and important; its people many, and mostly of her own sex. Few of them had approved of her presence at first, for they saw in her townish clothes and well-kept physical exterior the hint of an easy civilization that they had long ago forfeited or never known. Moreover, they would not soon forget the circumstances in which Lee had brought her there. They might respect or fear him, but never completely understand or admire him. His complexed, inward nature baffled them as much as still it could baffle Jennie herself. Better had he filled the post of the runaway secretary more conventionally with one of their own number, was their judgment.

But as the months passed and they became aware of how little there was in that strange, platonic relationship between Lee and Jennie to justify their suspicions, they fell to considering her more warmly. They saw the energy which she gave to her work, the zeal, the patience; and, in their own relations with Lee, they had come lately to regarding her as a willing and ever-friendly intermediary. If they had a grievance to air before him, she would express it for them and more frankly than they would have dared. "Yes, she rules him," they would say. "But with what?" Admiringly then they would wonder at her. While, always to confirm that admiration, was the affection which she inspired among the humbler people to whom she and her colleagues had dedicated their labours. Having in her six months there gained a useful colloquial knowledge of the local Chinese dialect, she was now combining with



her secretarial duties the task of interviewing those who sought the mission's help. If they survived her shrewd but gentle questioning and passed into the mission's care, they would remember her, going to absurd lengths in the simple, likable way of the unspoilt Chinese peasantry to show their gratitude; while those who had known her longer had coined for her, as they did for all the white people about them, a special name. *Virgin of the Good Sound* they called her, and it acknowledged her golden voice, her good-humoured laughter.

Yes, she was happy there, she would have admitted. Nevertheless, she could still afford her colleagues an ounce of legitimate gossip and speculation; for young Clements, who once had proclaimed his dislike of the mission at almost every supper-table and not at all infrequently in the bar of the local Customs Club, was still there—a thorn, as ever, in the side of his superiors; a flourishing and romantic rose to all others.

## IX

Only once in that long time had she received news of Hinty and Nadya.

At Christmas there had come a card for her: "To Jennie from Nadya and Dannie." And with it a letter from Nadya giving her the local gossip. The cabaret, like its competitors, had closed for the winter and its staff dispersed, she said; only she and the *shroff* being retained to look after the bar and card-rooms which would remain open the whole year round. But

with the news of *Hinty's* and its better known patrons exhausted, Nadya had nothing more to relate. Her only mention of Hinty himself was that he was spending most of his time at golf. Of her own affairs with him she revealed nothing, though, somewhat surprisingly, her notepaper bore the address of the same modest apartment-house in which she was living when last Jennie had seen her.

And that had been almost seven months ago!

But, one afternoon in late June, news of them came unexpectedly. Jennie was alone in the office when a visitor was brought to her—old Carson of Tsingtao.

Old Carson! Tsingtao's leading foreign resident! She remembered him well; the grave, courteous old fellow who in her early days at the cabaret had been the object of such extreme veneration on Hinty's part. She recalled Hinty's almost pathetic delight when first old Carson had asked him to play golf; his pride when old Carson had offered to teach him bridge. Yet that respect was hardly misplaced. Few were the people in Tsingtao who did not share it.

But, old Carson at Chwan Hu! And Tsingtao an uncomfortable three and a half weeks' journey away!

"Really," she was exclaiming, as she recalled his undoubted love of the fleshpots, "this is positively amazing!"

Mr. Carson, claiming the time-honoured privilege of patting her hand, made sighing acknowledgment.

"I suppose it is, my dear," he agreed a little sadly. "You must blame my doctor. I don't know what's

come over him lately. Nothing would satisfy him except my risking my neck on those darned rapids. . . . Change of air, something to shake my liver up, he says; though not a word about the wear and tear of my nerves! And, to add insult to injury, not a solitary drink until sundown, he says—and then only a single whisky to two-thirds soda.”

“Well, it’s a great honour,” she murmured.

“Still, Chwan Hu’s rather off the map,” she could not resist adding inquisitively. “How did you find me here?”

Did that question embarrass him? She was not quite sure.

“Well, you must blame a very friendly young ship’s officer,” he hastened to answer her. “Chap I met on the run from Ichang to Chungking! Actually I’d planned to turn back at Chungking, but, talking of Tsingtao where he spent a holiday last summer, he happened to mention your name. I think you—er—made an impression on him. He fancied you’d remember meeting him. Anyhow, there was I at Chungking, all lonely and eager for the sight of a Tsingtao face, when he told me about you. So, when I got off the boat, I dug up the nearest missionary people and made some inquiries. You were still here, they said.”

*Still there!* Old Carson had spoken of that fact rather as though it savoured of the extraordinary. But she made no comment. She smiled.

“How long do you stay here?” she asked.

The old gentleman pondered that question, staring

out to the mission's sedate courtyard. A trio of bespectacled young Chinese women with books under their arms were hurrying across it on their way to a senior students' lecture. Their air of earnest preoccupation seemed to affright him.

"Well, I'm going home," he assured her firmly. "Believe me, I've seen enough of this river to last me a lifetime. Still, I'm badly in need of a little *terra firma* for a day or two, and I'd thought of getting a haircut and having my clothes laundered.

"But where does one stay?" he added cautiously. "All I could see on the Bund was a ghastly hotel full of Japs and the smell of *sukiyaki*. I think I'll wait until I strike civilization again."

"Why not stay here?" she suggested. "We put up lots of people in the course of a year."

Mr. Carson was politely dubious. At which she laughed.

"Don't worry," she said. "Our hostel for visitors is conducted just like a private hotel. It's a separate institution, in fact."

"Really, my dear! But doesn't one have to sing *Onward Christian Soldiers*, or do something or other?"

"No! There's not even a scriptural text for the good of sinners on the bedroom walls."

"Good heavens!" Mr. Carson exclaimed. "I mean—extraordinary! No—excellent! Then, if I cared to have a little bottle of something—er—concealed in my room . . ."

She laughed again.



"The mission is very hard up," she said. "We've even been known to supply the soda!"

But now that Mr. Carson was delightedly expressing his intention of patronizing the hostel for at least a couple of days, there could fall on them the awkward realization that sooner or later they would have to discuss Hinty.

## X

That courage to do so was eventually found by Jennie as they sat over tea.

"How is he?" she asked.

"Who?" he retorted. But his guilty flush betrayed him.

"Hinty, you mean?" he continued. "Well, I couldn't say. The last I heard of Hinty was that he'd started a business in Shanghai."

"Shanghai? Then he's left Tsingtao. But what about the cabaret?"

He avoided her gaze.

"Sold up," he answered.

"But for quite a good sum, I understand," he added brightly.

"Splendid!" she commented. But first she must fight the tremor in her voice.

"I suppose he's taken a bigger place?" she continued quickly.

"A cabaret, you mean?"

"Yes, of course."

Old Carson frowned suddenly at the floor.

"No," he answered heavily. "Not a cabaret. He started a—a book-shop; a rather large book-shop, in fact . . . first editions, and all that."

"A book-shop!" she echoed wonderingly; and then: "That should be rather exciting, don't you think?"

"Exciting?"—Mr. Carson frowned again—"Er—yes, very! Still, there are quite a number of other book-sellers in Shanghai; long-established people like Kelly & Walsh, for instance . . . all sorts of people. He'll be a clever man if he . . .

"Well, he *is* a clever man," he concluded desperately. "Jolly good luck to him."

"Yes, jolly good luck!"

She fell silent.

But at last she could find composure again.

"Mr. Carson," she exclaimed suddenly, "we don't have to bluff each other. I think I know why he sold the cabaret. So do you, I fancy."

"Indeed!" said the old man primly, and then he permitted himself to look at her. Slowly he nodded.

"I was very fond of Dannie," he breathed. "I had his confidence, I think.

"Still," he went on politely, "pray don't misunderstand me. He behaved like a silly ass, and I didn't neglect to tell him so. I—I—well, I'm talking to a mem-sahib, my dear. I didn't blame you. It's just that—well, the dice were rather loaded against him; ironically so. Perhaps, with an ounce of luck, it might have ended very much differently.

"Er—but the man's a fool!" he added severely. "He ought never to have re-engaged that girl."

He coughed, frowning righteously at the wall.

"Well, let's change the subject," he said.

She smiled.

"I rather liked Nadya," she murmured.

At which Mr. Carson deemed it expedient to show his surprise.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, and I shall always like her. I'd been expecting to hear they were married."

"Why?" exclaimed Mr. Carson; but ". . . Er—yes, indeed!" he commented. "A little more milk, if you don't mind."

"But why didn't they marry?" she persisted.

He looked at her. A little smile seemed to play round his lips; a suddenly joyous smile, she thought. He sought to hide it, however.

"Why?" he echoed sedately. "Well, that girl's a tough handful, but I think she has sense. She realized he didn't love her, I suppose."

"But they didn't separate?"

"Er—no!" the old gentleman agreed musingly. "Still, if you're asking me: did she resume living with him? I don't think so. In fact, I'll swear she didn't. After you left it, that apartment of his was like—well, like a morgue. He got rid of most of the servants. He locked up every room of it except the kitchen and his bedroom, I'm told. And the girl? Well, he's not vindictive. He wouldn't send her away. And I

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fancy that in a strange sort of way he was trying to be kind to her. But he wasn't aware of her, if you understand me. In fact, he didn't appear to be aware of any of us. And I? Well, I'm his friend, my dear—his very great friend, if he'd only realize it."

"Don't!" she pleaded. But she recovered herself.

"Where is Nadya now?" she asked.

He frowned again. He did not seem to like that question.

"Well, she went to Shanghai also," he informed her. "He gave her a job in this book business, I believe. Whether she's still with him, I can't say. Try to judge her feelings for him, and the ordinary standards don't apply. She's Russian—semi-barbaric—untamed. Frankly, I've never been able to understand her. But . . ."

"But she loves him!"

"Loves him! Er—yes! Perhaps! Well, how should I know? However, if my luggage has arrived from the Bund, I ought to be getting to my room. . . . But, where was I? Oh, yes! He's taken a book-shop—very ambitious sort of place; too ambitious, maybe. Perhaps you'd like its address."

## XI

Old Carson had been at Chwan Hu four days—two days longer than he had planned.

"Tomorrow I ought to be pulling out," he had more than once said, but he was not in any hurry, it seemed.



He praised Chwan Hu's scenery, its peace, the comfort of the mission's hostel; or, if a more formidable excuse was necessary, he would sometimes pat his stomach and make cryptic plaint about his health. "Well, that doctor fellow may be right about me, after all, confound him. No sense in overdoing it. Perhaps I oughtn't to tackle that river again until I'm really fit."

Since that afternoon when he surprised her with his visit he had made no further reference to Hinty, however. Yet his very avoidance of the subject was sufficient to reveal how completely it obsessed him. He had liked Hinty, and obviously he still yearned for his friendship. Just as obviously he longed to see her and Hinty reconciled. And though she must be grateful to the old man for his decent silence towards these things, it did not comfort her. Sometimes, and much as she respected him, she could almost pray for him to go.

There came at last a day when this would really happen. He announced his intention of catching the boat to Chungking directly after tiffin. So relieved was she by this news that, when he pleaded with her to put aside her work for a few hours and go walking with him, she cheerfully yielded.

They strolled the hills, the neat, cultivated fields all about them. Here and there the coloured, mosaic-like expanse was broken by a village nestling in a grove of mulberry trees. The peasants bent to the earth, tending cucumbers, radishes, and sweet potatoes. A boy passed them, carrying a captive bird on a

stick, the bird taking seeds from his lips. A bullock-cart crawled lazily in the distance.

"Very peaceful!" old Carson was exclaiming for the second time.

Yet, down below, for his almost malevolent contemplation, lay the river—in flood now—rust-red.

"Ay," he breathed, shaking his fist at it. "And soon, you murdering old rascal, we'll be meeting again.

"However," he solaced himself, "there's always Shanghai at the other end. Which reminds me. When I get to Shanghai, I'm looking up Dannie—er—Hinty! And won't we hit it high!"

She had not expected that speech. Yet, with only a few hours of his company remaining, it need not distress her too much. She laughed.

"I fear the worst!" she commented lightly.

"You may! And I'll tell him you said so. . . . But what message for him, my dear?

"Or isn't there a message?" he added strangely.

She tried to jest, but the effort failed her. She halted, facing him.

"Mr. Carson," she pleaded, "wouldn't it be better if you didn't mention me? Why hurt him unnecessarily?"

He was silent for a moment. Then he smiled.

"I wouldn't hurt him for the world," he answered. "But would it hurt him? I wonder! Perhaps it might help him."

"Perhaps," she agreed. Yet he heard now her distressed protest:

"Mr. Carson, *don't!* I tell you, I'm staying here!" He nodded at last. Murmuringly he apologized and fell silent. They walked on. But he was not yet done with her, she knew. Presently, when she was hoping to distract him with her talk of the mission, there came his sudden blunt logic.

"Yes, yes, it all sounds very attractive. But, my dear, at the risk of offending you, I'm going to say that you don't deceive an old man. True, the green hills of Chwan Hu may be very pleasant; very pleasant, too, the thought that a few hundred people here have cause to be grateful to you. But the world is somewhat wider than Chwan Hu, and much as I'm not unsympathetic, the problems of its humanity are greater than those of a handful of peasants."

"They're as many as I and fifty other people here can find time to deal with," she retorted.

"Ay, and I won't disparage 'em!" he uttered. "But, fifty-and-one ostriches would consider themselves just as busy at burying their heads in the sand. And why not admit it? You're here chiefly because the most fanatical and self-imprisoning ostrich of them all has persuaded you to see glamour in it.

"And why does he persuade you?" he continued, almost heatedly. "Because, deep down beneath his polite, efficient-looking exterior he's a crazy fool . . . a crazy, inhibited fool who consigns himself to a joyless lock-up just because he fears the thing he most wants."

He halted. He took hold of her hands. He compelled her to meet his gaze.

"Well, that may sound a trifle involved," he ex-

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claimed smilingly. "But don't mistake me. I haven't been here all these days for nothing. I know Lee; I know his story. I'm deeply sorry for him. What's more, for some things I admire him. Particularly I admire the way he respects the sanctity of that unfortunate marriage of his. But why need he go about it so much like a monk who would shut himself up in a cell and dodge the realities? Why run away from Life; why not meet it bravely? And if one falls foul of it, well, why not get up and challenge it again? Surely, if there's a Divine wrath, there's a Divine mercy also!"

"I suppose you're right!" she heard herself admitting at last. "Still, if he's happier like that, why must you and everyone criticize him so terribly?"

He sighed, walking on.

"Is he happy?" he countered. "Well, perhaps he is. But let me show you the nature of that happiness. He's happy chiefly because, while a woman shares that same starveling existence with him, it seems more natural and real."

"And if I were content to share it with him?"

"Well, you'd surprise me. You're young, normal, healthy. You need a home, a man . . . babies. Tell me that you want anything else, and I'll laugh at you. . . . Jennie, let me take you back to Hinty."

He pleaded on, but he could not move her. Soon they had to return to the mission where she must leave him and go to the office, there to show herself unhappily to Lee himself.

When she entered the office, Lee was sitting at his large, somewhat untidy desk. If he suspected the cause



of her distress, he did not betray it. He grinned, and made cheerful comment on the fact that she was back earlier than he had expected. At the same time he toyed with a revolver.

"I've been renewing acquaintance with an old friend!" he exclaimed.

"An old friend?" she echoed questioningly.

"Yes, I've been cleaning it."

And then she realized that he was speaking of the weapon itself.

"Well, there's no accounting for friendship," she tried to jest, but he was beginning to puzzle her. His manner held the suspicion of a forced gaiety. She noticed the unusual brightness of his eyes, yet the dark rings beneath them. He seemed like a man who had just revived himself with liquor after a previous excess of it.

"But why do you keep the thing?" she asked suddenly.

He gave her a noisy laugh.

"Why not?" he retorted. "It wouldn't be the first time I was indebted to it. Believe me, they aren't all simple johnnies who walk into this place looking for a pot of ointment. Two summers ago, and in this very room, a couple of fellows held me up for the petty-cash box. . . . Yes, a fine old friend!"

"I suppose so," she murmured wonderingly. "Still, if you've finished with it, why not put it away?"

And then she could not restrain that sudden question.

“What’s the matter with you this morning?”

He laughed again, bidding her sit down.

“Nothing!” he retorted. “Why do you ask?”

“Well, if you don’t mind my saying so, you sound as though you’d been drinking.”

“Not a drop!

“But what would be wrong with it?” came the perplexing abandon of his mood.

She was not convinced, but she would not argue with him.

“Well, if one needs it badly enough, there’s nothing wrong, I suppose,” she answered good-humouredly. “But I—well, I was thinking you might be under the weather.”

His fingers were caressing the revolver again.

“Huh! I’m feeling as fit and fine as fifty fleas,” he boasted.

Yet his grin sobered. He stared suddenly and moodily at his desk.

“It will pass,” he whispered. “Yes, just give me twenty-four hours and I’ll have forgotten all about it.”

At which he was picking up and flourishing an English newspaper.

“It’s only this,” he confessed bitterly. “My Lords and Little Tom-Noddies who’ve sat for six months on the latest Divorce Commission have decided not to alter the law. In short, a man married to an adulterous lunatic may go on being tied to her until he’s a raving lunatic also.”

“I’m sorry,” she murmured, “very sorry.”

And then, slowly understanding, she snatched up the revolver.

"Don't be such a fool!" she cried.

At last she could find the words to soothe him.

"Yet, it's rotten . . . cruel! God in heaven never surely intended His laws to be interpreted in that revolting fashion. But look here! And this is something I've wanted to say to you for a long time. Why not leave here? Why not give up missionary work altogether? Find a place for yourself where people might expect—well, expect a little less of you; somewhere happier, somewhere more—more normal."

He looked up at her, smiling suddenly.

"What would you do if I took your advice?" he asked then. "Would you remain here?"

"Perhaps not."

"And then?"

She laughed, trying to make that answer sound casual and ordinary.

"Well, you wouldn't need me any more. We'd both go our respective ways, I suppose. Which reminds me. Somewhere in this world, although I never hear from them nowadays, I have something of a family—a father, a sister."

His smile died. He turned away from her and bent over his desk again.

"So! We'd go our respective ways!" he echoed strangely. "I shouldn't need you any more! . . . Well, I don't think we'll discuss it.

"But, leave here? No!" he answered her grimly.

"That isn't possible. Perhaps they hate me here; nevertheless, they need me. Yes, it may be difficult, but I have to stay on . . . my best for 'em . . . somehow . . . somehow!"

She heard once more his queer laugh.

"Go and get your tiffin," he said. "Carson will be expecting you to see him on to the boat."

"Perhaps. Yes, I suppose so," she faltered whisperingly.

He fell silent. She wondered what were his thoughts, but, after his quick, searching glance at her, he had turned from her again. She saw only his broad, athletic back, bent, unmoving over the desk.

She picked up her hand-bag.

"Well, I'll go and eat!" she exclaimed. "You'd better come too."

"Eat!"

She heard his great sigh. He looked up at her suddenly, and then she knew that silently he had been weeping.

"Yes, I'm delaying you," he apologized. "You'll have to hurry. . . . But tell me something; be frank with me. Carson has advised you to take your freedom?"

She did not answer, at which she heard his grim little laugh.

"Well, why not take it?" he challenged her. "Take it . . . find that sweet, tolerant world you wanted me to seek. Yes, I'm staying here. I must! But I think I've always impressed it on you; you are different,



you're free . . . free as the skies. Why not take your freedom?"

"Freedom!" she echoed whisperingly, and looked out for a moment to the white day. Then she answered him.

"Freedom is a man! Yes, only a man."

He stared at her, uncomprehending even now.

"I wonder whether I understand you," he began. "What do you mean by 'freedom is a man'?"

But she smiled. She cut his perplexity short.

"It's nothing," she murmured wearily. "Just something that a funny little Russian woman once said to me. . . . But don't worry! Mr. Carson suggested nothing of the sort. Come and eat. . . . And we ought to begin talking about that suggested Nativity play."

She touched his head.

## XII

The year grew old. The river had run low again. The red of the hills was reasserting itself beneath the harvested fields. In four weeks would be the white man's Christmas.

In the mission now was much activity. Infant voices were being drilled in the singing of Christian carols whose Chinese versions could sound so little like gladness, so much like parodies. Formidably the senior students rehearsed the Nativity play, and the younger of the hospital's doctors and womenfolk planned a

fancy-dress ball for Boxing Day, yet going clandestinely into sub-committee as to the amount of "drinking" which their superiors might be expected to permit. Memories of previous Christmases were searched, and, as a precaution, young Clements was deputed to explore the possibilities of smuggling cases of beer and whisky into various bedrooms. While even those who were not of the mission's elect were not forgotten; for the better advertisement of the white man's God over all other gods, the mission was arranging a distribution of food and gifts to the whole of Chwan Hu's poor, and regardless of the state of their souls.

Jennie Davidson, who found herself assisting in many of these preparations, could not help feeling slightly apart from them at times. To offer a simple Chinese people a sugary and Teutonic conception of Christmas which they could not possibly grasp struck her as being ridiculous and a waste of time. She preferred the atmosphere of the mission when it was devoted more austere to the healing of the sick and the comforting of the fatherless, and anything that sought to adorn these essentials seemed trashy and vulgar. But, perhaps, because of her preoccupation she might call herself content—at the least, not unhappy. She reminded herself occasionally that she was working until nearly midnight.

No further word had come of Hinty or Nadya; and from old Carson she had received no more than a letter of thanks posted to her at Hankow with a small gift. Politely he avoided the subject of their many talks together. Perhaps, indeed, when at last he saw

Hinty he would even decide not to mention her.

Yet her growing reassurance was suddenly banished. There came a letter not from Carson or Hinty, but from Nadya Skolnikova, announcing unexpectedly that she had married a man of her own nationality, and, what was more unexpected, a man who was quite poor.

*Am I foolish? [she jested]. I think not. When a man's so darned washed up that he regards you as a saint every time he sees you cooking a meal for him, there's something flattering in being his woman. Yes, we're going to be happy, and I've traded most of the swell wedding-presents for some real sensible necessities, including a spare bed that might be useful one of these days.*

Yet Nadya had not written merely to tell her that! She knew Nadya too well. Inevitably, to wring and haunt her, came also that news of Hinty. There was Nadya's long and unhappy postscript:

*Don't be sore at me, but I've got to tell you. Dannie Hinty worries me. He's splashed his money about considerably—a snooty bookshop, for instance, full of Shaw and Huxley but never a word about the corpse-on-the-mat, or Little Audrey. He's lent money also to some fool institution for providing broken-down cabaret-girls with higher education and nice jobs as governesses. Though just imagine those good English mamas trusting us dance-girls with their husbands around! But is he getting anywhere? I'll say not. If folks aren't pity-*

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*ing him, they're laughing at him. And I feel like murder every time I hear of it. But that isn't all! A few days ago I was dragged out of a rickshaw by Papa Carson of Tsingtao. He said he'd seen you in the summer, and gave me your address. Dannie's sick, he said—darned sick. After Christmas he's got to go into hospital—something to do with a wound he had in the War. But he doesn't care. Papa C. could hardly get a word out of him, he said.*

And then came that abrupt, almost challenging conclusion:

*Well, it's none of my business, I guess. But sometimes I dream about Dannie, seeing his eyes—the day you left him.*

### XIII

Few letters came for Jennie nowadays, and almost without exception they were from England. It was, perhaps, unfortunate that Nadya's letter should reach her as she sat one afternoon at work with Lee. When the *t'ing ch'ai* handed it to her, Lee could not have failed to see its Chinese postage-stamp. Therefore, when she had excused herself and read it, there seemed to be no alternative except to tell him.

"It's from Nadya Skolnikova. She's married."

"Nadya Skolnikova?" Echoing that name, he raised his brows. "Isn't that the girl who—well, the girl who caused all that bother at Tsingtao?"



She nodded, but she smiled.

"There's nothing wrong with Nadya," she retorted gently. "Just a woman like the rest of us, you know."

And then, checking her sigh, she bent down to her typewriter.

"Well, I'm sure she'll be very happy," she concluded.

Yet she knew that his curiosity was not satisfied.

Presently she heard his sudden inquiry.

"Married, eh? Then what's happened to Hinty?"

That question was perhaps legitimate; yet, with his frown to give such emphasis to its nervous, uneasy quality, it could seem almost like a trespass on her thoughts.

"Well, according to what Mr. Carson told me last summer, they parted long ago," she answered evasively.

"Quite!" he retorted. "But I rather imagined, from what Carson said, that they were still friends. What does she say about him now?"

He saw her sudden and unsmiling stare.

"So you and Mr. Carson discussed me!" she exclaimed.

He flushed, but he managed to smile.

"No," he answered.

"Well, you discussed Dannie and Nadya!" she continued with no less ill-humour.

At which he nodded.

"Well, yes," he admitted. "But quite casually, of course. Carson happened to mention Hinty one day when I showed him over the hospital."

She made no comment; after a thoughtful pause, she went on with her work, telling herself that her challenge had been rather foolish, if not unjustified. Should she show him Nadya's letter? she asked herself now. Yet only might she dispose of his ridiculous curiosity at the expense of making him miserable. . . . "What if pity overcame her and she went to Hinty?" would be his inevitable reaction to it; and though she might assure him again and again to the contrary, it would not help him. She knew too well the self-destroying inconstancies of his lonely, unbalanced mind. That fear would linger, words and logic failing to dispel it. And he would torture her with it only a degree less than he tortured himself.

No, she must not tell him!

But, disturbingly, he was by her side.

"Sorry if I've angered you," he began, "but—well, it struck me when you were reading that letter that the news wasn't too good, and I—well, I could only think it might have something to do with him."

"Him? Hinty, you mean?" . . . She shook her head and smiled. . . . "I'm afraid you don't understand us women. If I happened to look grim, I guess I was only reflecting Nadya's mood. . . ."

"Nadya's mood?"

"Yes, Nadya's mood. Having discovered that she thoroughly loves her husband, she must now be thoroughly unhappy about him also. . . . Will some other woman steal him from her? Will she always be able

to hold him, and so on? And he has a weak chest, poor man! What if he picks up his *balalaika* and joins the angels?"

She grinned.

"Yes, aren't we women ridiculous?" she exclaimed.

"Hardly," he answered, yet now he stared at her.

"But what does she say about Hinty?" he added. At which she felt her composure weaken again.

"Well, I thought I'd made it clear," she answered. "Not a word about Hinty! She's too busy talking about her man."

"I see," he exclaimed. "Yes, of course."

He moved away from her.

"Well, I shall have to be getting on with that annual report," he murmured.

Yet suddenly he faced her, pale, trembling, his hand raised almost menacingly.

"Why lie to me?" he demanded. "I didn't try to read that letter. But that girls' handwriting is pretty distinct. I saw his name! Yes, I saw it. . . . Why lie to me?"

She flushed. Unhappily she sat, slowly nodding.

"You saw it? Yes, you did," she whispered. "I'm sorry."

And then impetuously she was getting to her feet and pushing the letter into her hand-bag.

"What if I lied?" she stormed. "Must I give you everything? Why not demand a total surrender? Why not claim me body and soul?"

At which she flung herself out of the room.

## XIV

When her anger had subsided, she reproached herself that her handling of that incident had been unskilful. Better had she told him the truth. It was now in her mind to return to him and invite him to read Nadya's letter. If he refused, they could probably laugh and shake hands. If, on the other hand, he did not, then she need not be too surprised or hurt. She could perhaps despise him.

But could she despise him? First must one kill pity. And pity was an elusive rogue; importunate, insulting, yet ever defeating one. Pity died hard.

She did not go to him, however. Too restraining was her pride; for that incident had been only one of several during those past weeks; and always their origin had been in that same thing—his absurd fear of anything and anybody that might threaten her allegiance to him.

She recalled how, two days ago, he had frowned at her announcement that she had been invited to a dance. It was planned for that night to come, its hosts being a trio of American naval officers who were surveying the river beyond Chungking with a view to instituting a more permanent system of gunboat patrol.

The gathering would obviously be a simple affair, for, apart from the mission, the only place in Chwan Hu possessing a dance-floor was the Japanese-owned hotel down on the Bund. And a gramophone would supply the music! Nevertheless, the whole of the small



foreign community had gladly accepted the invitation, including several of the mission's womenfolk. Which had provoked Jennie's protest to Lee. . . . "If they can go, why can't you and I?"

But he had remained irritatingly obstructive.

"Please yourself, of course," he retorted. "But I'm weeks behind with that annual report. I can't afford the time. And if you go? Well, I don't want to stop you, but there's such a thing as keeping your dignity. I like these other men and women here to look up to you. For instance, young Clements and his crowd will be there. It's a certainty they'll be drunk."

She laughed. Though still he gave the mission his doubtful services, young Doctor Clements had abandoned all hope concerning her many months ago. As soon as his meagre qualifications could find him a job elsewhere, he would be merrily on his way. "A frozen lily on a funeral wreath!" was now his description of her. "And the wreath is Lee." But the mission's grave and preoccupied principal had failed to keep pace with those light-footed processes of the young man's not too stable mind. He still feared his contact with Jennie, unaware that Clements was now offering his romantic wisdom to one of the mission's own "converts," a young and attractive Chinese girl who had lately become a nurse.

However, Jennie had not troubled to argue with Lee on this. The dance, involving as it did a long trip down to the Bund by a sedan-chair, did not attract her too much, and, although she had not definitely decided

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to stay away from it, she had not mentioned it again. But now, rebelliously, she linked it with their quarrel over Nadya's letter. She would accept the invitation, even if only to reassert herself.

Dressing herself quickly after supper, she went, mischievously congratulating herself that she had not even troubled to inform him of her decision. If he missed her and suspected what she had done, so much the better. And if he were foolish enough to follow her, then he might stew in his own juice while she gave her company to any man who cared to claim it. He did not do so, however; and at length she found herself having to choose unhappily between dancing on a tiny, overcrowded floor and joining the throng in the adjacent bar. It was while she stood irresolutely in the intervening door-way, wondering whether it was too early to go home, that she found herself claimed by young Clements.

"Good egg! Didn't know you were here. And you've left the old ball-and-chain behind!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Nice work. I wonder how he likes it. Come and join the other mutineers."

At which, though she would gladly have escaped him, there was nothing for her to do except let her unaccompanied presence there be held up for public and doubtful applause.

"Great little girl!" Clements was reiterating extravagantly as he handed her a third drink. "Boys, give her a cheer. She's slain the monster, and with only the heel of a dance-shoe. And, if I may descend

to the vernacular, there ain't going to be no Cinderella act either. No, sir! She ain't leaving here till the barmaid's song. And the barmaid's married the brewer!"

The night wore on. She longed for fresh air or the peace of her room. Yet always there was some new distraction to detain her, and when eventually they succeeded in making her dance there was not a fox-trot that she had not heard at some time or other at *Hinty's*. . . . And Hinty sick; financially broken, perhaps; yet mute, uncomplaining, faithful still to that tragic role of *gentleman* which she herself had taught him. . . . "Am I tight? Good heavens, no!" she answered young Clements' teasing inquiry.

"Still, what if I were?" came the misery of her thoughts. "It might help!"

But at last it was over. She and her companions had reached the mission compound. They still laughed, shouting and whooping like school-children as they crossed the courtyard. A young English nurse began singing a parody amateurishly involving Lee's name. Jennie succeeded in silencing her. Yet she had disappointed the girl.

"All right, all right, Miss Davidson. Too much noise. Mustn't wake up the dear little sleeping Chinks. But you're afraid of him, darling . . . afraid."

Afraid! Jennie itched to shake the girl. But she said nothing. In the darkness she was now silently weeping at the futility of that escapade. It had accomplished nothing.

Hinty!

Lee!

God help her! . . . Herself!

## XV

She had expected to see Lee awaiting her. But she reached her room without challenge.

Lee's apartment was only a few yards away. He had never yet done so, but, if now he came knocking at her door to protest at the manner of her return, she could hardly resent it; for, even had he been asleep, he was now surely awake. But, though she sat for several minutes, preparing herself for that possibly stormy scene, he did not come. She began slowly to undress.

Yet she did not sleep. Lee's surprising and dignified silence could seem even more like a reproach to her than his angry outburst. And how ridiculous it had all been; how thoroughly deserving of his reproach . . . the young nurse, a mere girl, singing her drunken ridicule of him; Clements and his cronies deliberately staging a "rugger scrum" beneath his window. Yes, if only he came and she could utter her miserable apology to him, she might sleep the better.

Suddenly, however, she sat up listening. Out in the corridor she heard heavy, blundering footsteps; at which her thoughts instinctively flew to young Clements. He had not yet gone to bed; perhaps, even, he was coming to her room. Then, even as she sprang out to bolt her door, it had opened.



"May I come in?" she was addressed. But it was not young Clements. It was Lee himself, fully dressed, and probably more full of liquor than ever young Clements would find physically possible.

But there was no resentment in him. He laughed good-humouredly. Fixing his gaze on her easy-chair for a moment, he lurched to it and sat down.

"So you've beaten me . . . back first!" he teased her. "Well, I've always thought those young cubs of mine were a poor lot of drinkers. They can't hold the stuff. I guess the whole cissy bunch of 'em have passed out."

She glanced fearfully at the door, wondering if people in the adjoining rooms had heard him. But she could not be angry.

"Why don't you go to bed?" she murmured; and then: "Aren't you foolish? Whatever made you do it?"

He chuckled.

"That's a very beautiful night-dress you're wearing," he exclaimed. "But what made me do it? Well, if half the mission can go boozing at that third-rate Japanese pub, I can take a holiday also. . . .

"Yes, and show 'em how to do it better," he added hugely. "I've been to *Shiao Ma*!"

"*Shiao Ma*?" There came her shocked and only half-believing echo. She had heard of *Shiao Ma*. Who indeed hadn't? In the waterside district of *Shiao Ma* was localized all the town's vice. The tea-houses were there, the gambling-houses, the brothels. But a white man going to *Shiao Ma*! One heard of it rarely.

He saw her agonized frown and laughed.

"Don't worry!" he assured her. "I merely watched the 'all-in' festivities and spoilt a few bottles. And pretty poor stuff it was!"

But his grin died. He became suddenly and morosely challenging.

"Still, supposing I *had* stepped out? Half of the young cubs you were dancing with tonight would seduce the first woman they looked at—that's if they could get her drunk enough."

"But there's a difference, surely."

"Yes, a great difference," he retorted. "One thing's honest, and the other—well, ninety per cent of your modern menfolk are born without guts. Rather than imperil their precious reputations, or risk their pretty skins, they'll make cheap, flimsy love to some poor dazzled shop-girl or borrow somebody's wife. Respectability! Decency! . . . Sure! Why shouldn't I go to *Shiao Ma*? Is there anything cheating or dishonest about it?"

And then, observing her unhappy silence, he subsided and grinned again.

"Yes, I surprise you!" he uttered. "Lee, the missionary! Lee who teaches God! . . . Lee who, according to that bunch of smart Alecs you were hitting it up with tonight, isn't a man at all . . . just a sexless monstrosity; half monk, half rabbit!"

"Don't!" she pleaded. And then: "I'm sorry! It's my fault; all my fault."

Yet he shook his head.

"It's my fault," he contradicted her. "My fault, because I've given them something to laugh at. Believe me, there's no heroism in restraint, no glory in doing without. The world calls it abnormality . . . deformity!"

"But you're very beautiful," he added strangely. "The world would understand you better."

At which, impetuously, he was getting up and taking hold of her; pressing his lips to her white throat, her breasts; crying hoarsely her name. . . .

"Jennie! . . . Jennie! I'm just as they are. Jennie, I could take you now!"

At last she freed herself. Trembling, and a little afraid, she faced him.

"Yes, I know. But why?" came her piteous entreaty. "What do you want of me? I don't understand."

He laughed, drawing himself erect and straightening his tie.

"Don't worry!" he exclaimed. "The symbol is as good as the deed. I only want you to know it. I could have taken you—held you—just as they. No, they needn't despise me."

And then he answered her.

"Why?" he echoed. "Well, it's this! Having proved myself, having put myself right in your eyes . . . your eyes as a woman . . . I'm taking the only sensible way. I'm sending you back to him."

"Back to him?"

He grinned at her amazement.

"Yes, back to him!" he repeated. "I don't know

what was in that letter; I don't even care; but you still love him. Tell me the truth—you do!”

“I don't know!” she faltered. “Perhaps!

“But what of you?” she asked suddenly.

He went to the door. He stood there, gripping its handle.

“What of me?” he echoed. “Why worry? You love him. . . . But I'm staying here, seeing it through; they need me. And even if I go to *Shiao Ma* a thousand times, it won't matter. They'll still need me. I can still serve them. Well, good night!”

He took her to him, kissing her again. Then, abruptly releasing her, he opened the door; he went, his laugh echoing after him.

## XVI

She put out the light. A little apprehensive even now, she locked the door. But she could not sleep. She lay there, as often she had done, musing on that strange mental pattern of him . . . his strengths, his weaknesses, the hundred-and-one things that still eluded her understanding.

Yet on this night she had come to understanding him more than ever she had done before. Strange that she owed it to a flash of drunken confession which tomorrow he would probably regret. But she would not question it on that account. It had shown her the man as surely as though she held a mirror to his



mind; yet, ironically, the very man who most of all would have hidden himself from her.

She recalled his fierce, parting kisses; the manner in which he had claimed that intimacy, reckless of her reproof. He had been drunk, yes! But it was not the blind animalism of one who was beyond reasoning. There had been thought, plan; the sensibility that demanded courage of him. And had he realized that it was his triumph over her? Perhaps! But one did not deny him his triumph; for one hated not courage but only the cowardice in a man; the bargaining hesitation, the caution.

Yet as quickly as he achieved that triumph, he had thrown it away.

"I'm sending you back to him!" he had said. His laugh had risen even as he closed the door against her and was gone.

She pondered that strangeness . . . And he had been to *Shiao Ma*, the dark, evil place which the white man sought rarely. Remembering that confession, she shuddered for him. But he had defended his action, hugely, challengingly, making the respectability of the great middle-class mass to which she belonged seem mean and snivelling by contrast. . . . The seducers! he had said; the wife-stealers; the narrow-gutted playing for safety. She had been unable to answer him.

And he would go to *Shiao Ma* again.

Nevertheless she must ask herself, was he sincere in that threat?—the thought recalling inevitably the morning when, coming from saying farewell to old Carson,

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she had found Lee toying with a revolver. Surely he had planned to frighten her; and now once more he had laughed as he laughed then . . . the laugh of one who risked his all on the last desperate toss of a coin.

Yet if he were insincere, what now would it advantage him? He had offered her again her freedom; nay, more, he had commanded that she take it. *I am sending you back to him!* There had been finality in that speech, dismissal!

And if she went? . . . At which her heart leapt strangely. She sat up in bed suddenly. She switched on the light. How many times had she sighed over that postscript to Nadya's letter? Yet she must read it again.

*. . . Sick—darned sick. After Christmas he's got to go into hospital . . . he doesn't care. . . . But sometimes I dream about Dannie, seeing his eyes—the day you left him.*

Yes, she remembered that look in his eyes. Would she ever forget it? And now! . . . *Sick—darned sick! He doesn't care.*

Resigning herself to sleeplessness, she got out of bed and paced the room, halting at last by the window and gazing out from it. Down below in the moonlight lay the huddled roofs of Chwan Hu; like a tense silver ribbon beyond them, the river. But no longer did she frown at the river. So many hundred

times had she looked on it that it had become familiar, ordinary, its cruelty and horror forgotten. One saw it now only as that sole precious link with the civilization which she had left behind . . . Chungking, Wanh sien, Ichang, Hankow! One tabulated its places like stations in a railway time-table, with Shanghai to foot them—a radiant gateway to the world!

Shanghai! Her youthful imagination, starved and craving for expression, took impulsive, feminine tangent and savoured that name, giving it beauty, glamour, the quality of miracle almost. She saw its blazing sky-signs, the glitter of its stores, its thronged streets, the warm, endless intercourse of people in its discreetly luring hotels. When last had she bought a new hat? But greater than this was her thought of him. At Christmas, if she left on the morrow, she might be by his side.

Yet she checked that thought. One might regain yesterday only by permitting its trespass upon today. And today and yesterday had grown subtly and strangely apart; the long days and months intervening, the year and more; the myriad microscopic events, the changing scenes, the swift, daily afforestation of one's experience; the new, urgent aspirations, shooting up like grass at every rising of the sun. And Hinty in his lesser degree of experience would have travelled that road too—the hurt dwindling, one hoped; the initial stab that had inflicted it forgiven. Meanwhile were the new red wounds of today . . . gaping, unwashed.

"*Shiao Ma!* The hundreds who need him! The thousands!"

She shut her eyes.

There would be no sleep for her that night. There might be no sleep for the many nights to come. But suddenly she had quelled the trembling of her lips with the raw, masculine contact of a cigarette. Gazing then at the silver case which had held it, she snapped it shut. . . . And this was symbol! For shut too was now her mind. Lest it fail her, might it not open again for a long, long while.

She had reached decision.

Only would she permit herself one small solace. . . . "No, I don't love him. I don't think I shall ever love him. But *his, theirs, anything* while he needs me. . . . Dannie, I tried."

## XVII

That next day was Sunday, but instead of going to chapel she remained in her room until nearly midday. Then, as was her usual practice, she went to the office to open the mission's mail, looking for anything in it that might be important.

But the letters were already opened, she discovered. They were spread untidily on her desk; while, standing idly with his back to the fire, was Lee.

He had not yet shaved, and, from the fact that he wore an ordinary lounge suit, it was obvious that he had deputed the taking of the mission's Sunday-morn-



ing service to one of his assistants. She was not surprised. Yet, if he was feeling the effects of his previous night's dissipation, he did not betray it. He greeted her almost gustily.

"Well, how did young Armstrong acquit himself at chapel?" he asked. "A good lad, but whenever he has to take a service he always reminds me of a schoolboy blushing over his first glass of port. He ought to grow a beard."

"I wasn't there," she answered. "I stayed in my room."

There came his swift, laughing comment.

"Sleeping it off, I guess!"

She stared at him curiously. Considering his recent behaviour, he seemed unusually self-possessed; even a trifle indifferent towards her. But she had awaited that moment of privacy a whole morning long. She had rehearsed almost every sentence that she intended to utter to him. Therefore, though his mood might be surprising, it need not affect her.

Suddenly she went to him, offering him her smile.

"Look here," she began, "don't let's waste time. I think you know what I've come to talk about."

"Do I?" Grinning strangely, he had been gazing absently at the door. "Er—yes! I suppose so. You're going back to Hinty."

"And why not?" he added carelessly. "Good luck to you both!"

She fancied now that she understood his mood. She shook her head.

"Don't!" she whispered. "You don't have to. Yes, I know you're trying to be plucky. But it isn't necessary any more. I'm—I'm staying with you; understanding you. And you'd better know exactly what it means. It isn't easy to put it into words, but—well, there was last night, for instance."

"Last night!" he echoed. He flushed; his grin died. "Yes, I was intending to apologize for that. A pretty low-down effort——"

But quickly she interrupted him.

"Don't apologize. If you did, you'd spoil it probably. The man who was trying to be something he couldn't be doesn't interest me any longer. It's the other man, the man who——"

She gripped his arms suddenly.

"Don't you understand?" she exclaimed. "It's the darned suicidal fool who went to *Shiao Ma* that I'm talking about. . . . Listen to me! You don't have to go there any more."

Then limply her hands fell to her side.

"Well, that's that!" she breathed. "I've got it off my chest. We don't have to talk about it any more. All I ask is—well, be happy. For God's sake take care of me. There's nowhere else left to me except—except here!"

At last she knew that he understood. She looked up at him as she heard his great, jubilant laugh. His hand gripped her shoulder, dragging her back to him.

"You're staying with me?" he cried, unbelieving even now.

"Yes!"

"Belonging to me—always . . . understanding? For always!"

She was trembling, but she nodded; she touched his hand.

"My God!"

And then again was his noisy laugh.

"Jennie, it never rains but it pours. . . . Listen! When you came in, looking like a judge about to put on the black cap, I was going to tell you something . . . great news, wonderful news! She's dead. I'd only that minute read the solicitor's letter. My wife—dead!"

"Dead?"

"Yes, and I don't expect you to say anything. I know how you feel. You can't decently congratulate me. On the other hand, I can't be a hypocrite and pretend a grief that doesn't exist. I'm free—free! . . . All these years!

"Free, and you belong to me," came then his tense whisper. "Look at me. Tell me you love me."

She would not answer him. She could only try to share his jubilation.

"Well, I can't be hypocritical either," she exclaimed cheerfully. "I'm glad—for your sake; for hers, poor woman. I hope you'll be happy."

"Happy! Just wait and see. We'll live, we'll laugh. . . . Jennie, just how long would it take you to pack your bags?"

"My bags?"

“Yes, clear out of here!”

“You mean,” she faltered, “you mean you want us to get married.”

“Sure! Why not? What’s the objection?”

She forced a smile for him.

“None, I suppose. It’s only that—well, it’s taken me somewhat by surprise; your being free, I mean. Still, isn’t it a little too soon?”

“Why?”

And then he nodded.

“I suppose so,” he agreed. “The proprieties! One doesn’t mix the champagne with the ‘funeral-baked meats,’ and all that. A lot of humbug, considering I haven’t seen her all these years. However, we shall have to bow to it, I guess.

“Anyhow,” he continued gaily, “you’ve said the word. You’re mine. The waiting needn’t bother us. We can spend the ‘discreet interval’ whacking up health and strength somewhere a little more salubrious . . . Japan . . . Ceylon . . . Honolulu. Yes, let’s get packed. Let’s be on our way.

“But what is it?” he asked, for he must face newly her perplexity.

She hesitated.

“You want us to leave here immediately?” she questioned. “Not come back! Even though we’re not thinking of—well, of anything serious just yet?”

He nodded. He opened his cigarette-case.

“Exactly, my dear! You’ve got it in one.”

“What about the mission?”



“Well, it will have to carry on without me. And won’t some of the bright young lads cheer!”

“And you think you could get permission to be away that length of time?”

“Permission?” Suddenly was his amused guffaw. “I’m not even waiting for permission. I’m through . . . throwing it all up. We’re never coming back here, or to any other darned mission, for that matter. Jennie, we’re free!”

He chuckled; he strode to the window. If he saw her frown, it did not dismay him. He was grinning out to the courtyard.

“God, how many times have I looked at that polite bit of nonsense!” he cried exultantly. “Hating it . . . longing to see an earthquake engulf it. And now I’m free! There’s the wide earth—people, places, money! Think of it, Jennie. . . . We can tread where we will, ask what we will. Yes, money . . . leisure . . . freedom . . . everything!”

“Money?” she echoed. “Excuse me, but what money?”

Which forced him to turn and mark her pale, perplexed face.

“Gosh, don’t look so doubtful about it!” he teased her. “Oh, but—sorry! My fault! I’m so darned excited that I’m forgetting to give you the essentials. . . . Yes, money! What money?”

He paused, taking hold of her hands; making her wince, almost, beneath the burning intensity of his gaze.

"Jennie, it's this!" he told her. "I don't need to sweat any more. No more arguing with cheeky young puppies who think they know more of this racket than I; no more wearing myself thin for a bunch of darned barbarians whose only thought is for their bellies. Yes, pearls before swine! But it's finished. There'll be all the money I need. She's dead . . . her estate . . . investments . . . property! But for that dam' fool English law they'd have been mine long ago!"

He sat down, exhausted by his own emotion.

"God, and how I've earned it!" he breathed. "Anyhow, laugh . . . congratulate me! Free! You and I!"

She did not answer, but he went on crazily.

"And tonight we'll fling a party. Let 'em know *why* we're going . . . *how* we're going!"

And then suddenly she cut that delirious abandon short.

"We're not going," came her strange whisper. "At least, not you and I together. Reproach me if you will; I've altered my mind again. But, this time, it's staying altered."

Incredulously he stared at her; his half-smoked cigarette drooping pendulously from his lower lip; the colour playing fitfully on his lean, high-boned cheeks.

"But you can't be serious!" he protested. "It's marriage I'm talking of . . . our marriage . . . happiness. Dammit, Jennie, you wouldn't chuck away happiness and security. What's come over you?"

At last she silenced him.

"What's come over me?" she echoed musingly. "I

don't know exactly. But *happiness*, you said. And it's a word you've often tried to explain to me. Happiness—unselfish giving . . . spontaneous giving . . . the casting of one's bread on the waters."

Her voice quickened. He saw the dark, passionate blazing of her eyes.

"And I'd find it here," she went on. "Here with the little children, you said; the people . . . healing them, bringing laughter to them. Yes, and I'd be happy in making your happiness as well, even though I doubted you. Anyhow, your happiness was theirs, I told myself. They needed you. I stayed. After which—well, I seem to recall a whole lot of insanity, a whole lot of self-delusion. There was a man, sick and broken; yet like a fool I shut him out from my heart. There was even a moment today when I'd have bartered myself, thinking to save you from a cesspool like *Shiao Ma*."

He was on his feet, but she would not hear him. Bitterly smiling, she waved his pleading aside.

"Don't, please, in case I laugh! No more melodrama . . . no more revolvers . . . no more *Shiao Ma*. All you can say has already been said. You craved happiness; you've found it. You don't need me any more. . . . And the little children, the old people? Well, as you say, they're only a bunch of darned barbarians. Now that you're free and leisured and happy, what do they mean to anybody except that once you made me weep for them?"

There fell their long, deep silence. Only did he break it when he saw her going to the door.

"So that ends your promise to marry me!" he commented grimly. "My years of slavery and imprisonment count for nothing. And now that I could make you really happy you'd waste yourself on a social misfit like Hinty. My God! Where do you think it's going to get you?"

She shrugged her shoulders. She sighed.

"I don't know," she answered.

"Still, seeing that we can't leave the word happiness alone," she added, "let's say some more about it. Once you offered me a grand philosophy. Find a hundred per cent need to fill, and you'll find a hundred per cent happiness. . . . Well, you may have been wrong, but I happen to know a hundred per cent need somewhere. I think I'll risk a journey on it!"

## XVIII

She was speeding down-river, through the echoing gorges, over the long, sinuous rapids. Chungking, Wanhsien, Ichang; they fell behind without even her thought of them; noisy Hankow, grim Nanking. At last she was by his side. . . .

"Old boy!" she whispered.

But he could not yet believe, despite the cool of her hand on his brow.

"Huh, you don't need to be making any more mistakes!" he said. "I'm sick . . . oldish . . . a failure, perhaps. By the time they're through with me, there'll be just the steamer-fare home."



"Two fares, Dannie."

"Ay! And it would be kind of you. But think twice. I'm still in doubt about some of the fine things I once promised you. There's still a vulgar streak in me here and there. To be a diamond requires rather more than just its polish, you know. I'll never make it!"

And then, kissing him, she answered in that accent of his own fevered deserting.

"Who the hell wants a diamond, anyway?"

THE END









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